

FEMINIST ORGANISING, JUSTICE, AND CHANGE FROM BELOW

**REVIEW OF JORDANIAN WOMEN'S UNION'S
WORK 2017-2022**

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FOREWORD

This review is an important piece of documentation. It explores the contribution of Jordanian Women's Union, a member-based organization, whose work to advance gender justice has nationwide outreach. The review asks how service provision, which is central for the work and results of the organisation, form part of their broader agenda for advancing gender justice.

Service provision elicits support and trust towards the organisation amongst local communities. All activities of the organisation are inherently interconnected allowing for gathering insights that are essential for forming an evidence-based and effective strategy for advocacy, able to pressure duty bearers to include women's rights issues in policy. Thus, the review argues that there is a connection between working with individual rights within communities and change at the structural level, such as in legislation, economic (re)distribution or political representation.

KVINFO would like to extend our gratitude to Dr. Afaf Jabiri, who conducted the study and to Jordanian Women's Union for smooth collaboration in the elaboration of this review.

We are convinced that the review will be useful, not only for KVINFO and Jordanian Women's Union, but also for other women's rights and gender justice organisations that want to highlight the links between service provision and systemic change. The review will also be relevant for anyone interested in learning about the significance of women's rights organisations' work in their constituencies in local communities in Jordan and beyond.



Lene Steffen

International Director, KVINFO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review looks closely at the work of the Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) and asks: *To what extent do JWU's grassroots work with women contribute to substantial and lasting change in the society?* To answer this question, we broke it down into smaller ones: How does JWU engage with women at the community level? What type of change is JWU hoping to achieve? And how does JWU measure the impact of its work?

The review is approached from a decolonial feminist perspective, which means it does not measure change by numbers or outputs. Instead, it looked at how change happens within the context of the political and social realities women are living in, and at the way JWU sees women in the process of change, i.e. as active agents not as people who are simply "saved". To guide the analysis, the review used ideas of justice (Nancy Fraser), agency (Naila Kabeer), and intersectionality. Methods included reviewing JWU's reports and documents from 2017 to 2022, interviews with key staff, and focus groups with women and social workers who have worked with JWU.

JWU's work on the ground has proven to be a driving force for change, not just for the individual women they serve, but also for their families, society and policy processes. The review shows that JWU's programs tackle all three aspects of justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation. On redistribution, JWU provides essential support like legal aid, a hotline, shelters, and psychosocial services—especially critical during crises like the COVID-19 lockdowns. During that time, JWU managed to keep its services running, helping over 230 women, despite the added challenges of the pandemic.

JWU also focuses on the politics of recognition in the way it offers a platform to women whose voices are often silenced or ignored. Their legal literacy programs, for example, train women about their rights under the law and help them see their personal struggles as part of a bigger political picture. JWU's research, like the 2022 study on sexual violence and its connection to women's exclusion from the workforce, is another way they make women's experiences visible. These studies are shared widely, often in national media and conferences, positioning JWU as a producer of feminist knowledge.

When it comes to representation, JWU pushes for more women to be included in political spaces but at the same time acknowledging the limitation of women's participation in a context where the law itself requires reform. For example, JWU's proposed electoral law model advocates for inclusive laws, which shows that representation is not just about having women in positions of power, but about transforming what political power looks like.

From Naila Kabeer's perspective, the true power of JWU's work lies in its ability to expand women's agency. Women's power to make choices and take control of their lives is evident in how JWU supports women through legal training, leadership programs, and political education, especially for women from rural and working-class backgrounds. JWU approach is about building trust and collaboration within local communities; is not about top-down help.

However, the review also highlights a gap in how JWU's programs address intersectionality, which is at the heart of JWU's political vision, but is not always fully implemented in practice. While JWU does reach diverse groups of women, like refugees, women with disabilities, and

those from marginalised communities, their programmes do not always tailor services and activities to the unique needs of these women. This means that the specific challenges of the most marginalised might not always be fully addressed, especially in programme design and strategic planning. The review suggests that JWU could better integrate intersectionality into their programmes design and evaluation to ensure that all women's needs are met and that they have a voice in shaping the services they receive and the activities in which they participate. This would strengthen JWU's commitment to inclusivity and ensure that no woman is left out of the feminist approach.

In terms of moving forward, the review calls for JWU to continue focusing on strengthening its grassroots work, securing long-term funding, and expanding its youth leadership programs. It also suggests that JWU should continue advocating for feminist funding models that prioritise long-term support over short-term, project-based funding.

Lastly, JWU's grassroots work offers a powerful example of how feminist organizing can create change that is material, political, and transformative. Their work shows us that real empowerment happens when women are at the centre of the process, shaping their own futures. The challenge now is to build on this foundation, ensuring that the feminist movement remains inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to the needs of all women. The road ahead is one of deepening JWU's vision and making sure that no woman is left behind in the struggle for justice.

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INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

The Jordanian Women's Union (JWU) is one of the oldest feminist organisations in the Arab region. It was first established in 1945 by a group of politically active women led by Lawyer Amly Bsharat. JWU activists were central to the struggles that were taking place in the country, and the region, at the time. Their activism was tied to broader anti-colonial and nationalist movements. In 1957, the state shut it down. The same year martial law was imposed, and all political parties and civil society organisations were banned. The Union remained closed for nearly two decades.

In 1974, the organisation was re-established under the name Women's Union in Jordan. It was part of a wider moment across the region that was influenced by the upcoming UN Conference on Women and a renewed push for women's rights. But the political context remained restrictive. In 1981, the government again dissolved the Union. Although it won a case in court, the union could not operate. The state used other tools, intimidation, surveillance, bureaucracy in order to keep it inactive. In 1989, protests across Jordan forced the regime to open up political life in Jordan, where as a result Martial law was lifted, and space for political life returned. A year later, in 1990, the Union reopened. In 1994, it officially registered under its current name, the Jordanian Women's Union.

This brief history of the Jordanian Women's Union reflects the broader history of women's political activism in Jordan, its continuous persistence, its challenges, and its entanglement with state power. The JWU's experience shows how the state has repeatedly attempted to control, co-opt, or shut down feminist organising. Yet women have continued to resist, adapt, and reclaim space. Therefore, any attempt to review the JWU's programmes, whether in terms of influencing legal and policy change, or support for women on the ground must begin with its history, since this history is essential to understanding the role that the JWU plays today, its political strategies, the nature of its work, and how it connects with women across different parts of the country. These relationships are key to addressing the review's main question about *the extent to which JWU's grassroots work contributes to substantial and lasting change in the society*.

Over the last decades, through JWU's hotline and legal aid centres, shelters, awareness campaigns, and policy advocacy, JWU has built direct connections with women across urban, rural, Palestinian refugee camps and other refugee communities, like Iraqi and Syrian refugees. These connections have allowed JWU's work to remain relevant through continuously adopting strategies and implementing programmes that respond to the challenges that confront women on the ground, particularly in contexts where state institutions are either absent or inadequate in responding to gender-based violence (GBV) and the broader political, economic challenges that women face in their daily lives. This kind of work does not happen in isolation from shifting political and legal frameworks; they shape what engagement is possible for feminist organisations.

One of the key turning points that affected JWU's work, and more broadly civil society work in Jordan, was the introduction and amendment of the Law on Societies (commonly referred

to as the NGOs Law) in 2008. The 2008 Societies Law, and its later amendments in 2009 and 2015, increased state control over civil society organisations in Jordan. Under this law, JWU was moved from being registered under the Ministry of Interior, where they were treated more like political entities, to the Ministry of Social Development, where they are treated more like service providers or charitable organisations. This shift was not merely administrative. It reflected a deeper redefinition of the role of feminist and civil society actors. By removing their political character and reducing their work to social welfare the state meant to depoliticise and reclassify feminist organising, and thereby to weaken their ability to challenge structural power and policy in any direct way. It also changed the funding landscape, forcing many organisations to reshape their work in line with state-approved “development” agendas. Despite this, and as the review will discuss in further details JWU has continued to find ways to navigate these constraints and to focus on women’s rights, legal protection, and political presence, even when the way it operates and leads its work has had to change.

Understanding this context is critical, as it shows how JWU’s grassroots engagement is not just about providing services, but also about negotiating power, building political awareness, and finding ways to push back against systems that seek to depoliticise feminist work. Systemic change, in this sense and as the review will argue, does not only happen through legal reform. It also happens through presence, through survival, and through the creation of alternative spaces where women can organise, speak, and act.

This Review aims to engage with the work of JWU from 2017-2022 in relation to JWU’s work on advocacy and awareness raising on issues related to electoral and political rights, Personal Status Law, and GBV. The selection of this period of time and programmes under review are given here as examples of JWU’s works and programmes. The review is supported by KVINFO, Denmark’s Knowledge Center for Gender and Equality, which is a leading institution dedicated to advancing gender justice through knowledge-sharing and strategic support for equality initiatives both in Denmark and internationally. As the funder and manager of this case study review of the JWU programme, KVINFO plays a key role in facilitating a process that centres local feminist perspectives while encouraging critical reflection through a decolonial lens. Their involvement ensures that the project is supported by an institution committed to inclusive, context-aware approaches, without imposing external frameworks, but rather helping to foreground JWU’s agency and lived experiences within broader global conversations on gender and equality. It is important to note that KVINFO is not the only donor that contributes to the programmes under review, other donors included UN Women, UNFPA, among others.

The sections that follow will start with a revised methodology that is grounded in a decolonial feminist framework. This section will elaborate on the conceptual foundations that guide the analysis, while also outlining the qualitative methods employed in the review, including in depth interviews and focus group discussions with JWU staff and programme participants. The methodological approach, therefore, seeks to disrupt hierarchical knowledge production by centring lived experiences and locally situated feminist knowledge. This section also includes the purpose and aims of the review, and ends by mapping those of the JWU’s programmes that were included in the review, with particular attention given to the initiatives and campaigns implemented between 2017 and 2022. The mapping of programmes is to briefly introduce and explain the types of activities JWU is implanting at the grassroots level.

This period is marked not only by significant shifts in the socio-political landscape of Jordan, but also by evolving strategies within JWU to respond to the gendered impacts of austerity, displacement, and state-civil society relations. This review interrogates the political and structural contexts within which these programmes were conceived, funded, and operationalised. Subsequently, the review presents a critical analysis of the data gathered through the fieldwork, drawing connections between individual narratives and broader patterns of structural inequality. And finally, the report concludes with a set of context-specific recommendations aimed at informing future programming and feminist knowledge production, while also challenging donor-driven models that risk marginalising grassroots agency and resistance.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND FRAMEWORK

METHODOLOGY

The aim of this review is to produce a high-quality case study addressing the main question: 'What is the extent to which JWU's grassroots work contributes to substantial and lasting change in the society?'

Key sub-questions include:

- * How does JWU target individuals at the community level?
- * What kinds of change is JWU aiming to achieve through these approaches?
- * How does JWU assess or measure these changes?

It is important to note that this is not a review to assess whether the Jordanian Women's Union is "doing the work" on the ground, nor is it an evaluation of the efficiency or effectiveness of its programmes in the narrow technical sense. Approaching the work of a feminist organisation in such terms risks reproducing the same logics that feminist and decolonial scholars have long critiqued as rooted in managerialism, donor-driven metrics, and depoliticised development discourse.

The review affects that recognition of JWU's grassroots organising, not as supplementary, but as the core political driver of its impact at the individual, societal, and policy levels. Drawing on Nancy Fraser's framework of justice, redistribution, recognition, and representation, the review highlights that JWU's strength lies in its ability to link service provision with political organising, creating a model where legal aid, social and psychosocial support, and shelters are not neutral services, but tools for redistributive justice.

The review adopts a decolonial feminist standpoint, rejecting the idea of objectivity that positions the researcher as evaluator and the subject, in this case, the JWU, as object of scrutiny. As scholars such as Maria Lugones have argued, decolonial thought requires that we undo the coloniality of knowledge, which includes the hierarchies of expertise, the extractive gaze, and the measurement of activism through frameworks that are alien to the movements themselves (Lugones 2007).

Instead, this work is an attempt to think *with* the JWU, not *about* it. It is a feminist political conversation with an organisation that holds a long and complex history in Jordan. It is about engaging with the JWU's current approaches, not in abstraction, but in relation to its strategies, its survival, and the constraints the organisation faces within the shifting political and legal landscape of the country. It is a way of recognising that feminist organising is shaped by its conditions, and by its ability to resist, adapt, and remain politically relevant even when the space for action narrows.

In short, this review does not aim to measure impact or change through narrow, technocratic indicators or donor-driven metrics. Instead, it seeks to understand how JWU's grassroots feminist organising may challenge structural violence, reclaim political space, and redefine justice from a grounded, locally rooted perspective. The review centres political vision, feminist strategy, and lived realities, rather than outputs or project cycles, as the basis for assessing change.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Nancy Fraser's theory of justice argues that achieving full equality requires more than focusing on a single issue, such as economic reform or cultural inclusion. Instead, Fraser proposes a three-dimensional approach to justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation (Fraser 1998a; 2001; 1998b). These dimensions are not separate but deeply connected, and together they help us understand how inequality is produced, maintained, and resisted.

Redistribution focuses on economic injustice. For example, the unequal access to income, jobs, housing, education, and public services. (But Fraser's understanding goes beyond this.) Thus, Fraser reminds us that material inequality affects all aspects of life, including our health, safety, and basic survival. As she writes, 'struggles for recognition occur in a world of exacerbated material inequality... in caloric intake and exposure to environmental toxicity, hence in life expectancy and rates of morbidity and mortality' (Fraser 1998a, 430). In this view, redistribution is not just about wages or taxes, but also about how economic systems shape our everyday lives and life chances.

However, Fraser argues that redistribution is not enough. Recognition must also be addressed. This refers to cultural and symbolic injustice, and how some social groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, or people from marginalised communities, are made invisible, stereotyped, or devalued in society. Even if economic resources are distributed more fairly, justice cannot be achieved if people's identities are still treated as inferior or illegitimate. In many contexts, including Jordan, social and political norms are used to justify the exclusion of women from full participation in society. Challenging these norms is part of the struggle for recognition.

Redistribution and recognition again depend on a third and often overlooked dimension: representation. This addresses political injustice, asking who gets to participate in decision-making, who writes the laws, who speaks for whom, and who is left out. Without fair and inclusive representation, economic and cultural reforms may be imposed in ways that do not reflect the needs or voices of those most affected. Representation ensures that those who

are usually excluded, such as women from marginalised communities, are not only spoken about, but are actively shaping the systems that govern their lives.

Fraser's point here is that justice must be approached in all three dimensions at once. Without recognition, redistribution can reproduce harmful stereotypes. Without redistribution, recognition remains symbolic and superficial. And without representation, neither recognition nor redistribution can be sustained. This framework is especially useful in understanding the work of feminist organisations like the JWU, which does not treat women's issues in isolation, but instead challenges the political, economic, and cultural systems that structure inequality in Jordan and the region.

While Nancy Fraser's framework helps us understand how JWU addresses justice on multiple levels: economic, cultural, and political, it remains important to also centre a feminist perspective that captures how women experience and resist power in daily life. Here, the Capability Approach by Amartya Sen, and its feminist expansion by Naila Kabeer, provide essential insights. Sen's approach asks us to look beyond resources or formal rights and instead focus on what people are actually able to do and be; their real freedoms or "capabilities." This shift moves the conversation from what people have, to what they can achieve. Sen's original framework is general and not always attentive to gendered realities. Therefore, Naila Kabeer's work on capabilities and agency fills this gap. Unlike frameworks that focus only on resources or legal rights, Kabeer asks: what does it actually take for a woman to make a real choice in her life, especially in contexts where those choices have long been denied or shaped by violence, dependency, or fear?

The ability to exercise choice incorporates three inter-related dimensions: resources (defined broadly to include not only access, but also future claims, to both material and human and social resources); agency (including processes of decision making, as well as less measurable manifestations of agency such as negotiation, deception and manipulation); and achievements (well-being outcomes) (Kabeer 1999, 435).

Fraser's framework gives us the language to talk about structural injustice, redistribution, recognition, representation, while Kabeer brings us closer to the lived experience of women navigating these structures, and reminds us that without the capacity to act, no amount of reform will bring justice. Together, these frameworks can help to review JWU's work as a feminist project for transforming the terms on which women live, survive and resist, not as a charity work, not technical aid, and not even service delivery.

This review also acknowledges that intersectionality is not just a theoretical exercise, it is a political necessity, especially for feminist work in contexts shaped by colonial legacies, authoritarian rule, and religious patriarchy. A decolonial lens demands that we recognise how power operates not only through gender, but through its intersections with class, ethnicity, geography, legal status, and the enduring effects of colonial borders and international donor agendas. In Jordan, for example, not all women face the same forms of violence or exclusion. A Syrian refugee woman, a rural Jordanian mother, a Palestinian refugee woman, a female foreign domestic worker, a Jordanian middle-class urban woman, divorced woman, and a rural woman will each experience the state, the law, and society differently. Therefore, centring intersectionality means refusing to treat women as a single, unified category. It means recognising how structural injustice is layered and how liberation

cannot be achieved for some women while others remain silenced or excluded. Intersectionality, from a decolonial feminist perspective, is about power, who defines the agenda, whose knowledge is legitimised, and whose voice is heard. Without it, feminist organising risks reproducing the very systems it seeks to dismantle.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

The researcher's positionality in this study is shaped by a dual belonging. She stands both inside and outside JWU. Since joining the organisation in 1989, she has been part of its journey: helping to establish the Baqa'a camp branch, the hotline, and shelter services, and contributing to key studies on the political economy of gender-based violence, sexual violence, and women's withdrawal from the labour force. Although she left her formal role in 2001 and has since been based in the UK, her connection to JWU's activism and collective struggles has remained alive. This in-between position that is rooted in shared history yet distanced by geography, creates a space of critical reflection. It allows her to engage with JWU's staff through relations of trust and shared commitment, while also observing the organisation's work from a distance that invites questioning and re-thinking. Her positionality, then, is not fixed; it moves between solidarity and critique, between memory and observation, which is an approach grounded in a decolonial feminist understanding of knowledge as relational, situated, and accountable.

REVIEW METHODS

This review draws on qualitative data generated through a series of eleven semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with women participants, staff, project managers, legal committee members, and leadership within the JWU. The aim was to examine how JWU's feminist interventions operate in practice, what they achieve, and how they are experienced and interpreted by those directly involved; especially in contexts shaped by displacement, legal marginalisation, and institutionalised gender discrimination and GBV.

A central component of the fieldwork was a focus group discussion with 15 women from Hitteen Palestinian refugee camp, which is a place marked not only by material deprivation, but also by a long history of political disenfranchisement and legal precarity. An interview with JWU's Hitteen branch social worker followed the focus group. Her role, far from being a neutral "service provider," revealed the emotional and political labour involved in offering support to women under conditions of scarcity, and the thin line between support, advocacy, and protection.

Another focus group was held with JWU's Amman-based hotline team, which included two lawyers and two social workers. These women operate at the sharp end of the justice system, where abstract laws meet the realities of women's trauma, silence, and fear. Their insights revealed how deeply gender-based violence is embedded in institutional structures, and how the hotline functions not merely as a crisis service, but as a tool of legal literacy, solidarity, and resistance.

Interviews were also conducted with one member of senior management, three project managers, and two members of the legal committee. These interviews provided insight into how feminist strategies are developed and contested within the NGO space, where political

ambition is often shaped—and at times constrained—by donor frameworks, national policy shifts, and the politics of legal reform.

The analysis drew on a composite framework of Nancy Fraser's three-dimensional theory of justice (redistribution, recognition, representation), Amartya Sen's capability approach, and Naila Kabeer's feminist notion of agency. These were not applied mechanically but served as entry points for examining how JWU's interventions shift access to resources, disrupt dominant gender norms, and expand political voice. In line with a decolonial feminist perspective, the analysis rejected any universalising or depoliticised narratives of empowerment. Instead, women's own descriptions of struggle, survival, and transformation were treated as theory in action.

Intersectionality was woven throughout the analysis—as a lived reality. It was impossible to speak of gender without also engaging with class, refugee identity, rural displacement, marital status, and the legal hierarchies embedded in the personal status law. From the stateless woman in Hitteen to the lawyer at the hotline centre, each participant revealed how layered systems of oppression demand layered, intersectional forms of feminist resistance.

DESK REVIEW & PROGRAMMES MAPPING

DESK REVIEW

For the purpose of this review, the focus is placed on JWU programmes supported by KVINFO between 2017-2022. This is for two key reasons: first, to maintain a focused and coherent scope; and second, to explore how this specific partnership may have contributed to JWU's strategies in advancing feminist organising and gender equality based interventions, while remaining attentive to the power dynamics and the need to centre local feminist priorities and knowledge. Therefore, in addition to interviews and fieldwork, this review draws on an extensive desk review of JWU's programme documentation submitted to KVINFO between 2017 and 2022. These reports include annual narrative and financial reports, training materials, policy papers, internal evaluations, and published studies supported through the partnership. The documents offer rich insight into JWU's evolving strategies across legal reform, political participation, gender-based violence prevention, and rights-based education. More than simple records of activities, these reports reflect how JWU positions itself as both a service provider and a political actor, working to transform structural conditions that marginalise women—particularly in refugee, working-class, and legally vulnerable communities. The desk review allowed for an initial mapping of key interventions and timelines, and helped trace how JWU's advocacy priorities—such as electoral reform or the personal status law—were framed, challenged, and redefined over time. By reading these texts through the combined lens of Fraser's justice framework, Sen and Kabeer's concepts of capabilities and agency, and a decolonial feminist lens, the analysis moves beyond surface-level evaluation to engage with how JWU constructs feminist knowledge and mobilises grassroots power under shifting political and social constraints.

PROGRAMME MAPPING

JWU's interventions between 2017 and 2022 have combined grassroots awareness, legal

reform, institutional engagement, and research-based advocacy. This section maps the key programmes grouped thematically and chronologically.

From 2017 to 2022, JWU's political participation programme evolved into a multi-dimensional strategy integrating legal reform, grassroots mobilisation, gender-based violence prevention, and rights-based education. The organisation's work reflects a feminist, decolonial approach that challenges structural barriers, promotes inclusive governance, and links local struggles to global human rights frameworks. Its model Electoral Law remains a visionary alternative to existing structures, and its integrated interventions across years demonstrate a consistent commitment to systemic, sustainable change.

LEGAL REFORM AND ELECTORAL ADVOCACY

2019–2022

JWU consistently advocated for the adoption of a modern Electoral Law designed to promote equal representation, inclusive participation, and accountability. While the Jordanian parliament adopted new electoral and political party laws in 2022, JWU continued to promote its alternative draft law—considered by the organisation as more democratic and inclusive across gender, class, ethnic and tribal lines.

Key activities included:

- * Community awareness sessions on the model law, reaching 240 community leaders.
- * 48 training sessions on electoral processes, targeting 484 rights holders.
- * Specialised training for 280 women candidates in the 2022 Municipal and Governorate Council elections, resulting in 68 elected women.
- * Ongoing engagement with duty bearers and stakeholders at both national and local levels.

2020–2021

Despite COVID-19 disruptions, JWU continued promoting its model law to CSOs, CBOs, and municipal council members, while also revisiting its legislative proposals in light of changing political conditions. The pandemic delayed the launch of a key study on the impact of sexual violence on women's public engagement, which was eventually launched in 2022.

2019

The organisation trained 34 municipal council members on their roles and women's participation and ran 70 public sessions on democratic elections, reaching 1,749 rights holders.

LINKING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

2021–2022

JWU deepened its exploration of how gender-based violence (GBV) impacts women's political and economic participation. A study led by feminist scholar Afaf Al-Jabiri investigated the intersection of sexual violence, labour market withdrawal, and political marginalisation. The study revealed that 10% of women who experienced sexual violence left the workforce entirely, while 78% reported experiencing some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.

2017–2018

JWU conducted training for hotline staff and protection workers on responding to GBV, especially with vulnerable women. Reproductive health workshops expanded reach to women in marginalised areas, increasing awareness of reproductive rights. Preparations began in 2018 for the later study on GBV and public participation.

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE OF INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUMENTS

2019

To strengthen rights-based advocacy, JWU trained 27 activists and staff on UPR and CEDAW mechanisms, followed by a workshop for CSOs and parliamentarians. These sessions aimed to equip participants with the knowledge to engage in shadow reporting and rights-based policy work. JWU continues to position itself as a key actor connecting local issues to international accountability mechanisms.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

2018–2020

JWU provided sustained training to municipal councils and local CBOs, focusing on:

- Human rights and legal frameworks (215 council members trained in 2018).
- Civil values and the role of women in municipal governance.
- Democratic values and mechanisms of elections (trainings held across all governorates).
- Meeting management and administrative skills for 58 CBO staff.

These trainings aimed not only to empower women, but also to instil rights-based governance within local institutions.

LEGAL LITERACY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

2018–2020

Legal literacy courses formed a core element of JWU's public engagement work. Topics included early marriage, divorce, domestic violence, and custodianship. Courses were held in JWU branches and partner CBOs, reaching hundreds of men and women, and aimed to create an informed public capable of challenging discriminatory legal and social practices.

CRISIS RESPONSE AND SUSTAINING SAFE SPACES

2020

During the COVID-19 lockdown, JWU adapted its services to sustain 14 hotline and safe space locations. These centres provided essential support to 230 women, with 436 follow-up sessions and 20 women accessing shelter services. Despite limited staffing, JWU maintained its protection mandate, reaffirming its role as the only NGO managing a shelter in Jordan.

RESEARCH AND FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

2018-2022

As part of its broader political and feminist agenda, JWU invested in research that links structural violence with women's exclusion from public and economic life. Two major studies were carried out during the reviewed period.

The first, launched in 2018 and examined the interconnections between gender-based violence (GBV), women's labour force participation, and political engagement. The study revealed significant structural obstacles, including the impact of sexual violence on women's decisions to withdraw from the workforce and public life. Findings were presented at a national conference attended by civil society, media, and international organisations—positioning JWU as a producer of grounded, feminist knowledge in the region.

The second study, initiated in 2022, focused on sexual abuse and its impact on victims' participation in the workforce. Preparatory activities included agreeing on the methodology with the lead researcher and conducting start-up workshops with the research team. Though early in its development at the time, the study reflected JWU's sustained commitment to documenting lived experiences of violence and using that evidence to inform policy advocacy.

These studies serve as critical tools in JWU's decolonial feminist approach—one that prioritises knowledge produced by and for women in Jordan, rooted in their realities and struggles, and not imposed from external frameworks.

PROGRAMME IMPACT AND STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

According to JWU Director Nadia Shamroukh, the organisation's long-term goal is not only to promote women's rights through isolated programmes, but 'to build a broader social justice movement that can challenge the structural foundations of inequality in Jordan'. As she puts it, 'we cannot create a social movement that brings about change without engaging with all segments of society.' JWU's internal documents and strategies that guide JWU's work show that JWU aims to go beyond technical reforms and 'addressing how political, legal, cultural, and economic systems intersect to exclude women, particularly through laws, institutions, and dominant social norms'¹. JWU's strategy reflects what Nancy Fraser describes as a three-dimensional understanding of justice: the need for redistribution, recognition, and representation to achieve full equality. For JWU, redistribution involves more than enabling women to participate in the job market; it means changing the legal and political systems that produce inequality in the first place. This is evident in their work around the Personal Status Law, which directly affects women's economic rights in marriage, divorce, and child custody. These laws often push women into poverty or make them dependent on male guardians, and JWU's coalition challenges this by advocating for fairer alternatives. But economic justice is also present in their support for women facing gender-based violence,

¹ This is included in JWU's strategic goals document that was submitted to JWU 2024 General Assembly.

especially through shelters, legal aid, and safe spaces—services that provide immediate support while pushing for long-term change.

At the same time, JWU works toward recognition by challenging how cultural and religious norms are used to justify discrimination. Director Nadia Shamroukh emphasises that achieving gender justice in Jordan requires confronting not only legal texts, but also dominant ideologies that define the state itself, such as the constitutional declaration that “Jordan’s religion is Islam.” This is why JWU links its electoral law reform work with trainings on feminism and secularism. These sessions are not just educational; they are meant to open up political space to question whose voices count in defining national identity and public values. As Nadia Shamroukh explained, by preparing communities to have these difficult conversations, JWU is laying the groundwork to shift both the public discourse and the legal structures that reflect it.

Representation is also a key part of this strategy. JWU’s efforts to influence electoral law and support women’s political participation, through candidate training, public awareness campaigns, and legal advocacy, are grounded in the belief that women must not only be present in political spaces but also shape the rules of those spaces. For example, their proposed model electoral law as Nadia and other members of the Legal Committee explained, goes beyond increasing women’s quotas; it calls for a system that is inclusive across gender, class, and tribal lines, and that holds power accountable. Representation is not treated as symbolic, but as structural: who gets to define the law, who is heard, and who is silenced.

Across all of these areas, legal reform, service provision, feminist education, and coalition-building, JWU is working to build what Shamroukh describes as an organised, feminist movement that does not separate immediate women’s rights from long-term structural change. This reflects a feminist approach rooted in local realities but informed by broader theories of justice. JWU does not isolate women’s issues from broader political and social struggles; instead, it places them at the centre, insisting that true justice in Jordan cannot be achieved without transforming the very systems, whether legal, political, and cultural, that maintain women’s marginalisation. As Shamroukh put it in the interview, ‘this struggle is not just national, but regional, part of a wider fight against oppressive forces across the Arab world’. This vision was behind the establishment of Roa’a Network, which is a regional feminist network that coordinate and implement advocacy initiatives jointly.

Kabeer reminds us that having access to resources or rights means little if a woman cannot act on them. Agency, for her, is not just about decision-making, but about the power to challenge the social norms, structures, and institutions that have historically silenced or limited women’s choices (Kabeer 1999). This is deeply relevant to JWU’s work. A woman fleeing domestic violence may have access to a shelter, but without legal protection, economic independence, or social support, the option to leave remains limited or dangerous. JWU’s approach, offering legal aid, protection services, feminist education, and political training, creates the conditions that allow women to imagine and pursue alternatives. These interventions expand women’s capabilities, not only in the material sense, but in the political and symbolic sense: they open up what Kabeer would call “strategic life choices.” (Kabeer 1999, 459)

But agency that is discussed by JWU's staff goes beyond the individual. As stated by a number of staff, who work at the level of project management, JWU's work to train women for political participation, push for a democratic electoral law, and engage in feminist coalition-building is a form of collective agency. It reflects a recognition that individual empowerment is not enough in a system that continues to marginalise women structurally. As Afaf Jabiri argues in her work, the fight for gender justice in the Arab world is inseparable from confronting the patriarchal, colonial, and authoritarian arrangements of power that define the state, the law, and even the family (Jabiri 2016).

Through this study on the Political economy of JWU, it aimed at highlighting and linking women's political participation, economic exclusion, and experiences of violence as connected struggles, not separate issues. From 2017 to 2022, Jordan's economy continued to suffer, shaped by IMF policies and neoliberal reforms that put more pressure on working people, particularly women from marginalised communities and groups. Unemployment rates among women remained high, and many were pushed further to the margins of public and political life. At the same time, laws and social customs continued to exclude women from political participation, often using tribal and patriarchal structures to justify their absence (see full analysis in the JWU study on the political economy of GBV).

The study aimed to inform JWU programmes and raise awareness that violence against women is not just physical harm, it is also structural, and it keeps women out of political life, workplaces, and decision-making spaces (JWU study on the Political Economy of GBV). The study showed how violence limits women's ability to act, speak, work, and lead. In this way, JWU addressed GBV as a political and legal issue, but at the level of intervention JWU did not stop at the hotline and shelter, legal aid services, and awareness campaigns; these interventions worked together to protect women while also challenging the conditions that produce violence in the first place.

Another key example is JWU's work on electoral law reform. Through its legal committee, JWU drafted a new vision for a more inclusive electoral law. Again JWU did not stop there. They took this vision to the streets—through workshops, public campaigns, and legal awareness sessions. These efforts aimed to shift the public conversation about who has the right to participate in politics, especially in a system still shaped by tribal and patriarchal deals. JWU's work on the electoral law has played a crucial role in redefining political participation in Jordan. It has focused on building women's knowledge and leadership from the ground up. By introducing and facilitating discussions around the newly drafted electoral law, JWU engaged directly with women at the local level, and invited them to critique, shape, and participate in conversations about the changes they demanded. Through collaboration with municipal councils and the training of women to engage in local governance under the proposed legal framework, JWU embedded a deeply participatory approach into its everyday organisational practice. In doing so, JWU has broadened the very definition of political participation by creating real spaces where women can lead, organise, and imagine new political futures, even amid challenging political and economic conditions.

FOCUS GROUPS

GENERAL REFLECTIONS ON THE FOCUS GROUP WITH WOMEN IN HITEEN CAMP'S JWU' BRANCH

A focus group was organised with women who had participated in JWU's awareness sessions, accessed its services, and contributed to its campaigns. Fifteen women took part in the discussion. The commitment of women to JWU's work was clear as they arrived on time, prepared and very keen to engage in the focus group discussion. So was also the sense of pride and gratitude in being chosen to represent other women in this conversation. Every woman spoke multiple times; it was striking that no one hesitated to share their thoughts or respond to the questions despite the size of the group. They were not shy about engaging in discussions or sharing personal stories. This demonstrated the strong connection these women had with each other and with the JWU branch in the Hitteen Palestinian refugee camp, and more broadly with the JWU. It was also evident that they felt comfortable and supported in the way they expressed themselves confidently.

The discussion began by asking women which of JWU's programmes they had been involved in. Their answers showed that there was not one specific programme that stood out for the individual woman. However, women spoke about the first activity they joined or the first support they received, and for more than half, their first contact was through an awareness-raising campaign. Later, they went on to seek legal, psychological, or social support. Others first came to JWU for help, and then took part in other activities. This shows that women's involvement with JWU often grew over time, moving between support and activism depending on their needs and situations.

In order to protect privacy we made clear for the women that the focus group was not intended as a space for personal experiences; protection of privacy did however not prove to be an issue at all, due to the sense of safety and solidarity that JWU has managed to offer these women, complicating this idea of privacy. These women were already familiar with each other's struggles and understood their experiences as part of a broader, collective story rather than isolated events. For them, breaking the silence around GBV and recognising the broader struggle they are a part of had become a source of pride. It was important for the women to share not only where they had been, but also where they are now—and where they hope to go in the future. For example, Lama, who first came to JWU to ask about her legal rights after divorce, went on to leave her parental home a few years later. She explained that she came to realise the way her family treated her and her children was abusive and unacceptable. Lama now works as a cleaner in a local private kindergarten. She does not live far from her family home, but as she said: *"Living independently made the interaction less than before. And when you have the means to support yourself and your kids, you reduce the intervention in your life."*

Lama, like many others, spoke openly and freely about the violence she had faced. It was also clear that other women in the group were already familiar with her story, which reflected a strong sense of shared experience and mutual support. If we take a feminist decolonial perspective, the question of privacy must be politicised and re-understood. It is not simply about individual boundaries, but about understanding privacy within context. These women

are not merely negotiating power within their personal lives, but by doing so they are also confronting larger systems of oppression. Therefore, the boundaries they set during the discussion were shaped by their collective experiences and political struggles. They were the ones who determined the rules of engagement, and this is crucial within a decolonial framework, where true respect of women's agency requires gaining power over the space and defining one's own narrative. This also confirmed what staff at the management level expressed in relation to collective agency.

Another issue raised in the focus group was the complexity of negotiating gendered power within a broader context of statelessness, protracted displacement, and intergenerational exile. The women's stories spoke not only to the everyday violence they endure, both gendered and political, but also to the political consciousness that emerges from their struggle to survive, organise, and be heard. For these women, being Palestinian and being a woman are intertwined. Their identities are shaped by a history of settler colonisation, displacement, and dispossession, and their experiences of violence and resistance are inextricably linked to the Palestinian struggle for liberation. Samah, who is originally from Gaza, and was married to a Jordanian man, who did not accept to apply for the citizenship for her, kept reminding everyone by saying 'not the same for me, you know, refugees from Gaza are treated differently'

Also, during the focus group it was very hard for women to speak of their struggles without acknowledging the genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza, an issue that was strongly present in the focus group discussions, particularly when sharing their struggle they kept repeating 'but this is nothing compared to what our people are enduring in Gaza'. This shows that living in a Palestinian refugee camp, the women understood their personal struggles within the context of a collective Palestinian struggle. They did not view their individual challenges as separate or distinct from the broader experience of displacement and occupation. This sense of collective struggle is central to their fight for justice, as they recognise that their personal battles are part of a larger, ongoing resistance. This perspective reflects the decolonial idea that individual struggles cannot be understood in isolation, but rather must be seen as part of a collective fight against colonial violence and injustice.

However, within the group, there were differences in how women related their personal experiences to their Palestinian identity. Some of the women held non-Jordanian national numbers, like Samah who held Egyptian travel document. These women experienced additional layers of marginalisation and vulnerability compared to those who held full Jordanian citizenship. This highlights the intersectionality of their struggles and how gender, nationality, and refugee status converge to create distinct, yet interconnected forms of oppression.

The intersectionality of their experiences also reminds us that the struggles of Palestinian women cannot be understood in isolation. They are shaped not only by their gender but by colonialism, occupation, and displacement. Any effort to support the liberation of Palestinian women must recognise these complexities and view the fight for justice as both a personal and a collective one, a gendered and political struggle.

IMPACT AT THE INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY AND SOCIETY LEVELS

None of the women who participated in the focus group spoke of change in purely individualistic terms following their engagement with JWU's programmes. It was striking that when reflecting on what change meant to them, they did not centre their own personal development or self-improvement as an isolated goal. Rather, all participants, without exception, offered examples of how JWU had contributed to broader changes within their family. This was particularly evident in the words of Sameera, a participant whose story shows how the impact of women's empowerment is often seen, and valued, not just through personal achievement but through the well-being and success of their children and families. Sameera, a single mother who had lost all ties with her ex-husband following divorce, said proudly, *"I am so proud of my kids. One now is an engineer. The engineer was raised at JWU. He was with me in the meetings. He got so close to JWU staff that when I had any trouble with him, they were the ones who intervened."*

Her words reflect the centrality of collective and relational change/impact within this context. In the quote, Sameera does not speak about herself in isolation; rather, her sense of self and success is tightly bound with the future of her children. She connected the impact on her as rooted in her son's educational and professional achievements as well as in the fact that he is now an active supporter of JWU. *"My son supports JWU,"* she added. *"He is a committed member. Whenever we need anything, he is available to help."* The support that JWU provided for the entire family including the son now contributed into financial stability of the family, as Sameera mentioned, his education and profession took the family out of deep poverty.

Here, we see a generational impact of JWU's role, which did not stop with Sameera. It extended to shaping the values, commitments, and choices of her sons and daughters. This is particularly significant given the structural constraints of life in a Palestinian refugee camp, where access to education, employment, and upward mobility are severely limited by ongoing displacement, statelessness, and the socio-political marginalisation of refugees. That her son could become an engineer, while being raised in such conditions, becomes more than a personal family success story, it is a political act of survival and resistance against a system designed to exclude. Given the strategy discussed earlier, this is not an unintended outcome, it is precisely the point of JWU staff and leadership members and women in the focus group, that support cannot be only at the individual level, as women cannot operate on their own and are in need of support at multiple levels. Supporting their children, particularly in continuing their education was necessary for those women to continue their journey in being independent.

Sameera did not romanticise her journey when she explicitly stated, *"If it was not for the confidence I gained from JWU programmes, my children would not be where they are now. I was lost when I first came to JWU. I came to attend an awareness session on family law, this was seven years ago. JWU helped me regain my strength, believe in myself, find work, and be a good example to my kids."*

The significance of Sameera's narrative lies in her articulation of change as a transformation of social relations rooted in context - not as an individual escape from oppression. Empowerment, in this case, was not something internal and abstract, but rather collective,

practical, and relational. JWU's support enabled her to rebuild herself as a mother, provider, and community member, despite the multiple forms of structural violence she faced—including patriarchal control, legal disempowerment, and the systemic marginalisation of refugee women.

Moreover, the way in which Sameera narrates her change challenges dominant development discourses that often treat women's empowerment as a linear and individual process. Her story emphasises interdependence, care, and rootedness in community, and reflects a decolonial understanding of empowerment, one that does not mimic Western liberal ideals of self-sufficiency. In this regard, JWU's support goes beyond service provision. It creates a space where women like Sameera can redefine power and agency on their own terms. This includes reclaiming their role within the family, asserting their authority as mothers and heads of households, and reshaping future generations—despite, and in defiance of, the structural exclusions they face.

Many of the women in the focus group shared reflections similar to Sameera's, placing strong emphasis on the interconnected nature of their personal growth, social engagement, and community empowerment. While they acknowledged the importance of the support, skills, and knowledge gained through JWU's programmes at a personal level, such as finding employment or completing their education, they also spoke about how these individual transformations were closely tied to a wider ability to access rights, challenge violence, and support other women.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS

The connection between personal change and collective responsibility was evident in stories like Amal's. Her first encounter with JWU came through the literacy programme. *"I came to learn how to read and write so I could help my kids with their schoolwork,"* she explained. However, her journey did not stop there. Over time, Amal became a well-known figure in the camp, a local activist whom many now see as a first point of contact when they are in need. *"I can't walk in the camp without being stopped,"* she said, smiling, *"someone always needs something from me."*

Amal referred many women to JWU's services, such as the hotline, legal advice, and awareness sessions, and was instrumental in connecting others to support. Her role had grown so influential that she had become a target for local election campaigns, with candidates seeking her endorsement and outreach. While Amal admitted that she sometimes works with these campaigns as a source of income, she also stressed that she is selective. *"I don't just help for the money,"* she explained. *"I support the good candidates."* When asked what she meant by a 'good candidate', she referred to one of the political training sessions she had attended with JWU, which had helped her develop a more critical lens.

However, Amal herself has never voted in a parliamentary election. This, as she explained, was not because she lacked interest or awareness, but because she considered the process “*useless*”, pointing to the limited role and perceived ineffectiveness of the Parliament itself. This sense of disillusionment was shared by nearly all the women in the group, with the exception of two, who stated that they participate in all elections, whether parliamentary or municipal.

This widespread disengagement from formal political processes, particularly parliamentary elections, cannot be separated from the broader political context of Jordan or the particular realities of refugee life in the camp. Here, political participation is not simply about access to the ballot box, but about the broader structures of power, representation, and exclusion. In contexts of protracted displacement and statelessness, where legal recognition, full citizenship, and political agency are systematically denied or restricted, elections become a space of disempowerment rather than empowerment.

For many Palestinian refugees in Jordan, including the women in this focus group, the Parliament is not seen as a site where their needs or rights are addressed. Its functions are often perceived as symbolic, lacking the ability—or the will—to bring about meaningful change, particularly for marginalised groups. Within this reality, political disengagement is not apathy; it is a form of political critique. It reflects an understanding that the structures on offer do not serve their communities, and that participation in such structures may legitimise the very exclusions they are fighting against.

Furthermore, the women’s political engagement takes other, often more impactful, forms. For example, Amal’s influence within her community, her mobilisation of women to access legal and social services, and her selective collaboration with local candidates are all forms of political action. These actions may not fit within dominant narratives of formal political participation, but they represent a grassroots feminist politics—grounded in care, solidarity, and survival. This reading resists narrow definitions of political engagement and recognises that for women living in camps, under layered systems of oppression, colonial, and state control, politics is lived in the everyday. It is found in how they navigate social norms, challenge violence, raise their children, support other women, and build networks of resistance and survival. In this context, JWU’s role has not simply been about raising awareness or providing services or about building capacity for political candidates. It has also been about facilitating the conditions for this everyday politics to flourish.

The women’s narratives reflect a deep understanding of power as something built collectively from below. Their stories highlight a feminist politics that is rooted in community, shaped by struggle, and critical of institutions that claim to represent them but fail to deliver justice. This form of politics, though often invisible in mainstream accounts, is a vital site of resistance and transformation—one that must be recognised, supported, and amplified.

The collective nature of these women’s transformations speaks to a deeper form of empowerment, one that refuses to be reduced to the individual, and instead insists on the political and generational dimensions of liberation. In this way, the work of JWU can be seen as part of a wider feminist decolonial practice that challenges patriarchy, and resists the systemic violence of settler colonialism, exile, and state neglect.

CHILD MARRIAGE AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGN, BUILDING KNOWLEDGE CAPACITY, AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE

In 1999, Jordan amended its Personal Status Law, raising the minimum legal age of marriage to 18. However, a critical loophole remained: judges retained discretionary power to authorise marriages for girls under 18 if it was deemed “in their best interest.” This clause lacks legal clarity and has enabled the continuation of child marriage, particularly in contexts shaped by poverty, displacement, and patriarchal control. As a result, legal change has not led to structural transformation.

Data from the Department of Statistics (DOS) show persistent rates of child marriage: 11.6% (2008), 14.2% (2013), 11.4% (2019), and 9.9% (2024). The variation indicates not progress, but stagnation. It also shows the limitations of state reform in the area of women’s rights, where legal amendments are introduced under international and civil society pressure but weakened through mechanisms that preserve gender power hierarchies.

This pattern points to what feminist theorist Nancy Fraser describes as “affirmative recognition without transformative redistribution.” In other words, the state may adopt the language of women’s rights to appease public or donor demands, while maintaining the institutional structures that reproduce gendered inequality. The “best interest” clause allows the state to appear compliant with human rights frameworks, even as it delegates control to a male-dominated judicial system, thereby re-inscribing traditional hierarchies under the guise of reform.

The JWU has taken a consistent and long-term approach to combating child marriage. A national campaign it led in 1997 contributed to the 1999 legal amendment. Since then, JWU has integrated this issue into its legal literacy programmes, Personal Status Law reform, GBV campaigns, and community outreach efforts. JWU treats child marriage not as a cultural norm but as a systemic form of violence against girls and young women, rooted in poverty, lack of education, and social control over women.

Through its community branches, JWU has provided equality awareness sessions, legal guidance, and psychosocial support to women affected by child marriage. These efforts are embedded in JWU’s wider strategy to shift power dynamics at the individual, community, and policy levels.

REFLECTING ON CHILD MARRIAGE IN THE FOCUS GROUPS

In the focus group with women in Hiteen Camp, 12 of 15 women reported having been married before 18. Their stories reflect the deep intergenerational impact of child marriage and the transformative potential of feminist awareness.

One participant, Ibtihal, was married at 16 and to protect her from domestic violence she later arranged the marriage of her eldest daughter at 15. “This is what I knew,” she said. “I thought it would keep her safe.” Years later, after attending a JWU training course in Hitteen and attending lectures and awareness campaigns against child marriage and other issues, Ibtihal began to understand the long-term consequences. She resisted her husband’s pressure to marry off their other daughters. Today, three daughters are pursuing education and one is employed in a local salon. “You can see the difference,” she reflected. “My eldest is miserable. I feel guilty, but now I know better.”

Ibtihal's story reflects a powerful transformation across the three key dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. As discussed earlier, Kabeer defines empowerment as the expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices in contexts where this ability was previously denied. In Ibtihal's case, this transformation is deeply rooted in her access to knowledge, her growing sense of agency, and the changes she was able to make in her daughters' lives:

ACCESS TO RESOURCES, KNOWLEDGE, AND SUPPORT

Ibtihal's participation in JWU's legal literacy and awareness-raising training represents a shift in the resources available to her — not just material, but also informational and social. Prior to this, her decision to marry off her eldest daughter at 15 was shaped by limited access to rights-based education, and by her internalisation of patriarchal norms that normalised early marriage as a form of protection. Her actions were not simply out of ignorance but were shaped by structural constraints and survival logics in a violent environment.

The JWU training acted as an enabling resource, expanding Ibtihal's understanding of child marriage as a form of gender-based violence, and challenging the internalised narratives that had previously guided her choices. This shift illustrates how access to feminist knowledge is a key resource in the empowerment process.

The women in the focus group spoke about how they found jobs or completed education after joining JWU programmes. These achievements are not just about "personal ambition"; they reflect a response to economic injustice, especially in contexts where women, particularly refugees or those without legal status, are denied access to stable income, housing, or social services. JWU's support, whether through legal aid, awareness, literacy support, or job training, provides the material resources that are often completely absent from state structures. This is redistribution in action: giving women the tools to survive in a system that excludes them.

AGENCY: EXERCISING VOICE AND RESISTANCE

Following her engagement with JWU, Ibtihal began to re-evaluate her earlier decisions and make different choices for her younger daughters. This is a clear example of what Kabeer terms "transformative agency", which is the ability to make choices and to challenge social norms and power dynamics. By resisting her husband's attempts to marry off the other daughters, Ibtihal confronted deeply rooted gender hierarchies within her family household.

This agency is particularly significant because it was exercised within a context of unequal power, at the family and societal level. Her reflection: "I feel guilty, but now I know better", speaks to the moral and emotional labour of empowerment. It shows how women often carry the burden of harmful systems, and how recognising that harm can become the starting point for resistance and transformation.

The outcome of Ibtihal's changed decisions is evident in her daughters' lives. While her eldest daughter, married at 15, lives in what Ibtihal calls "misery," the younger daughters

have access to education and employment, which are routes closed to Ibtihal herself, and to her first daughter. These achievements are personal wins in addition to structural breaks, shifts in the trajectory of women's lives that signal broader social change when multiplied across communities.

Kabeer emphasises that empowerment involves more than just gaining resources, more precisely it involves being able to make meaningful choices. This was clear in how women spoke about helping others, referring women to JWU, or selectively engaging in election campaigns. Lama, Sameera, Ibtihal, and Amal were not passive recipients of aid; they were active agents in their communities. Lama managed to leave an abusive family, Sameera to have her children pursue an education, Ibtihal to prevent her younger daughters from marrying as minors, and Amal to choose which political campaigns to support, despite financial need. All four examples show how a woman exercises agency, even within limited circumstances.

APPLYING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TO WOMEN'S NARRATIVES

Many women shared how they regained confidence, found their voice, and became active in their communities. (Sameera spoke with pride about her son, Amal became a local leader). What we see here is a demand for recognition as survivors of violence, as women with knowledge, value, and agency. Fraser reminds us that denying people social respect and visibility is a form of injustice in itself. When JWU creates spaces where women's experiences are seen and heard, not as isolated cases but as part of a larger political reality, it pushes back against this denial. Women are not just being helped; they are being recognised as central to community life and struggle.

Almost all the women rejected formal political processes like voting, describing them as "useless." This reflects Fraser's third dimension: representation, or rather misrepresented. Refugee women are not just economically poor or socially devalued, they are politically excluded. The system does not speak for them, nor does it include them in decisions that affect their lives. Their refusal to vote is not apathy; it's a political statement. They are rejecting a system that offers no real power or change. Meanwhile, women are engaging in politics in other ways—by helping each other, referring others to services, leading within their communities. This is *representation on their own terms*, grounded in lived realities, not symbolic inclusion.

Naila Kabeer focuses on what people are actually able to do and be, instead of rights on paper. Her work reminds us that empowerment is about real choices, made possible through access to resources, critical awareness, and the power to act. The choice of not engaging in political processes, according to Kabeer is then a real choice.

Women spoke about being able to work, support their children, leave violent homes, or lead others. These are examples of enhanced capabilities, not in theory, but in practice. For example, Amal's journey from learning to read to becoming a trusted community contact shows how building one skill (literacy) enabled a range of other choices and actions. Sameera and others who shared stories about family empowerment, as a single mother in a

refugee camp, linked her personal strength directly to her children's success. Therefore, JWU offers an expansion of women's real options in life.

At the same time, Kabeer's framework helps us see the limits of empowerment when structures remain unjust. Many women still face legal, economic, and political barriers that make some choices impossible. For example, women without Jordanian nationality face extra discrimination. Parliament feels irrelevant because it is not built to represent their concerns. While JWU can expand capabilities, there are still deep systemic constraints that must be challenged at the structural level.

- * **JWU's role** is not simply to "serve" women but to support them in rebuilding their lives, asserting their agency, and navigating a deeply unjust system.
- * **The women's narratives** show that empowerment is both personal and collective—empowerment concerns survival, resistance, and building futures.
- * **The social workers' accounts** remind us that this work is emotional, political, and often invisible. It demands long-term care, not quick fixes.

Empowerment, then, is not a final destination. It is an ongoing struggle, made possible through community, solidarity, and critical awareness. JWU's work, when seen through the eyes of Fraser and Kabeer, is a reflection of justice in action.

PERSPECTIVES FROM JWU'S STAFF, LAWYERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS

When speaking with women who have taken part in JWU's programmes, the immediate impression is that their journeys were smooth. That once they walked into JWU, things started to change right away, as if something magical happened. Most of the women focused on the positive aspects of their experience, even when asked about challenges. This is important to note. It may be that the women didn't want to talk about the painful parts of their past, perhaps because it still hurts, or because they are tired of retelling their trauma. But it could also be out of a deep sense of gratitude to JWU. When support is rare and hard to come by, women may want to hold onto the good rather than revisit the difficult. Both are understandable, and both tell us something about what it means to speak while holding pain and hope at the same time. However, it was in the focus groups and interviews with JWU's social workers and lawyers that a different side of the story came out. These are the ones who walk alongside women at meetings or sessions etc. over months and sometimes years. They see the everyday struggles, the breakdowns, the steps forward and the many steps back. They are the ones who follow up when things go wrong, who call late at night when a woman is in crisis, and who celebrate quiet victories that no one else notices. And they do this work while also running awareness sessions and community campaigns.

By the time the focus group with JWU's social workers and lawyers took place—late in the day—many of them made clear that they were already exhausted. Yet, their reflections were grounded, powerful, and politically charged. Several spoke about how, in their view, there is no real distinction between "awareness-raising" and "service provision". As Hanan Banat, director of the hotline, put it: *"It's all part of the same work."* Social workers and lawyers

explained that when a woman hears about her rights in an awareness session and returns the next day seeking legal advice or psychosocial support, this is a continuation of the same process. This understanding shows that change whether personal, social, or political does not come in sudden breakthroughs, but through trust, repetition, sustained support, and collective care.

And yet, we must also recognise what this work costs. These social workers and lawyers carry not just legal files, but also the weight of women's pain and the frustration of dealing with systems that often fail to protect. They do this work under enormous pressure, emotionally, politically, and sometimes even physically. Their exhaustion is about long hours of listening to women or supporting them. It is also about witnessing injustice every day, and knowing that sometimes, even your best is not enough. This also reminds us that change is not linear. That empowerment is not always visible. Behind every "success story" is a long process of struggle, small steps, and silent support. For example, for many women, the shift is not about becoming part of formal politics or voting in elections. As the workers shared, 'many women say that voting is useless, not because they don't care, but because they don't believe these institutions represent them. And they are not wrong', as one of lawyers shared in the interview.

Instead, women are doing politics differently. They are building power through relationships, through knowing their rights, through helping each other. Women like Amal—who started learning to read so she could help her children and is now helping others in her camp—are doing more political work than many elected officials. This is the kind of feminist, grassroots organising that often goes unseen.

Therefore, the reflections from JWU's social workers and lawyers highlight something essential and important which was expressed by one of the social workers interviewed: 'real change takes time. It takes trust. It takes care'. And it also takes people who are willing to do the emotional and political labour of walking with women, not ahead of them, not in their place, but beside them.

This way of working and thinking about change and support to women is deeply political, though not always recognised as such. It is not based on donor-driven logic, technocratic checklists, or imported models of service delivery. Rather, it emerges from JWU's vision and the embedded relationships within the communities JWU serves, and from lived experience, from knowledge of the structural and everyday violences women face, and from a refusal to treat these violences as merely "private" or "individual."

Therefore, JWU's staff are doing feminist work at its core by making space for women to speak, to learn, to act, and to support one another. Yet, what was largely absent from the discussion with social workers and lawyers was an explicit connection between these practices and feminist theories. Their work reflects a grounded, decolonial feminist ethic, but it is rarely named or framed as such. This lack of theoretical anchoring does not weaken the value of the work, but it does represent a missed opportunity to reclaim and politicise what is often dismissed as routine or "ordinary" work.

Feminist theory, especially when approached from a decolonial perspective, could play an empowering role here. It offers a language and a framework to understand that what these

women are doing is not simply service delivery; it is transformative, political, and resistant work. Knowing that your everyday actions contribute to broader struggles for liberation can shift how you relate to your labour, your community, and the structures you are pushing against.

Many of the social workers and lawyers had attended feminist courses, but often not the kind that connect lived practice to theory, or that reflect the specific histories, contexts, and political realities of women in Jordan. Questions such as *What does agency mean in a context shaped by colonial legacies, neoliberal governance, and patriarchal control?* or *How is the idea of privacy mobilised to silence women or remove their struggles from the political realm?* - are theoretical questions rooted in practice, and JWU is well-positioned to engage them.

CHALLENGES TO THE WORK OF SOCIAL WORKERS AND LAWYERS

One statement from a participant in the focus group captured the contradiction many women face: "I wish I did not know my rights. Sometimes to know your rights and not be able to access them is harder than not having them in the first place." This sentiment was not isolated. It was echoed by social workers and lawyers alike, activist workers who are actively engaged in raising awareness and advocating for women's rights in Jordan. For these women, knowing their rights and fighting for them is not always a straightforward achievement, it often brings with it the painful awareness of the barriers that stand in the way of justice.

This insight also speaks to a deeper, often unspoken reality: the gap between awareness and action. Women may have an understanding of their rights, but the practical realities of accessing those rights are different. As Intisar, a lawyer at JWU said: 'While raising awareness is a critical first step, it must be followed by a thoughtful, pragmatic approach that prepares women for the difficult and often discouraging path they will face in trying to claim those rights'. It was agreed by all lawyers and social workers that without this deeper understanding of the reality of women's rights at both theory and practice, raising awareness may inadvertently set women up for disappointment, frustration or even put them in danger.

From interviews and focus groups it was noted clearly that it is crucial to recognise that women cannot escape the cycle of violence or seek legal recourse without first knowing that these opportunities exist. Knowledge is the first crucial step, but it is insufficient on its own. Women must be equipped with information and with a clear-eyed understanding of the challenges that lie ahead. Social workers and lawyers both emphasised the necessity of providing women with the "full picture", not just a theoretical or idealised version of their rights, but a realistic, nuanced view that includes the hurdles they may encounter in their pursuit of justice. Only with this awareness, can women make informed decisions, manage their expectations, and, ideally, be supported to navigate the system in the face of adversity.

In essence, the challenge is informing women of their rights in a way that helps them prepare for the complex and often daunting process of asserting those rights in a society where systemic barriers are deeply entrenched. This delicate balance between awareness and practical support remains a fundamental challenge. Therefore, the institutional barriers

and discriminatory laws and practices remain one of the significant challenges before the work of JWU with women.

CONTINUITY OF AWARENESS RAISING CAMPAIGNS:

One of the key aspects of JWU's work has been the continuity of awareness-raising campaigns. These campaigns are not one-off events; they require long-term commitment, ongoing engagement, and rootedness in the communities they serve. From a decolonial perspective, this continuity is essential. It challenges the dominant donor-led model where time-bound projects often replace long-term struggle, and where knowledge and leadership come from outside rather than from within.

To sustain its work beyond the limitations of short project cycles and shifting donor agendas, JWU developed a method based on collaboration with smaller, often local, grassroots organisations. This method involves building the knowledge, skills, and capacities of these groups so they can carry on the work in their own contexts. In this way, the campaigns do not end when the funding ends. They continue locally in various locations in Jordan and with ownership.

This approach reflects JWU's vision in relation to the necessity to shift power and knowledge production away from central institutions and external actors, towards local communities and grassroots voices. It also recognises that women's equality cannot be achieved through top-down interventions, but rather through sustained, community-led action.

Staff at the management level, including Nadia, Maysa, and Mukaram, all highlighted this strategy as a vital way of pushing back against donor policies that limit the scope of funding. Many donors are reluctant to support awareness campaigns, viewing them as too political or not measurable enough. By working with 22 partner organisations, JWU managed to spread its message far beyond its own branches, ensuring the continuation of its core values and goals even in the absence of direct funding.

However, this work is not without challenges. Supporting smaller organisations requires resources, trust-building, and time. It also requires resisting the pressure to deliver fast, visible results for donors. Yet, JWU's approach shows that by investing in relationships and local knowledge, awareness-raising can become not only sustainable, but also deeply rooted in the everyday realities of women across Jordan and this, ultimately, is the heart of any meaningful decolonial feminist practice.

In the focus group with women, I asked: *"What would you like to see JWU doing more of?"* Their answer was clear: *"More campaigns and training courses, like before."* This response reflects how much women value JWU's awareness-raising efforts, and how central these campaigns have been in shaping their understanding of rights, violence, and social change. But it also reveals a gap. Their call for "more, like before" speaks to a decline in outreach and engagement at the grassroots level, due to a range of structural and political challenges discussed earlier and below this section. These include limited and unstable funding, increased pressure on services, and the growing difficulty for social workers and lawyers to leave their offices due to heavy caseloads. In addition, there are external constraints, like, the restrictive legal environment shaped by Jordan's NGO law, government and its control over civil society.

THE REBRANDING OF VIOLENCE AND THE CHALLENGE OF DIGITAL SPACES

One of the emerging challenges identified in the work of JWU is the rebranding of GBV under new names, particularly within digital spaces. This shift reflects not only how violence adapts to new platforms, but also how language is used to disguise it, often making it appear more acceptable or less serious than it truly is. Social workers share how on social media, for example, certain forms of abuse are now commonly referred to as “toxic relationships.” This term, largely imported from Western pop culture and celebrity discourse, may appear more accessible or relatable, but it risks ignoring the deeper, structural nature of violence against women. By framing emotional manipulation, coercion, and control as mere “toxicity,” rather than as part of broader systems of patriarchal violence, the political and social dimensions of GBV are downplayed, if not erased entirely. This rebranding shows how global digital cultures can impose language and frameworks that obscure local understandings of violence. This language often comes detached from the lived realities of women in the region, replacing grassroots feminist analysis with depoliticised, individualised terms.

Digital platforms have also introduced new forms of violence. While social media can offer women space to express themselves and connect, it has simultaneously become a space where women are increasingly targeted. Staff and frontline workers shared disturbing examples — women being coerced into sending private photos, only to be threatened with exposure; secrets used as tools of control; and constant digital surveillance by partners or family members. These are not separate from traditional forms of violence — they are extensions of them, reshaped in the digital age.

JWU has recognised the urgency of this issue and is now implementing a digital-based GBV programme, focused on addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV)². This includes training, awareness-raising, and providing support for women affected by online threats, blackmail, and digital surveillance. The programme as Maysa Faraj shared in the interview aims to build digital literacy among women and girls, empowering them to navigate online spaces safely while naming and resisting the forms of violence they may encounter there.

STRATEGIC LIMITATION/CHALLENGES AT THE LEVEL OF ORGANISING

SUSTAINING CORE SERVICES: A STRATEGIC CHALLENGE

While JWU has succeeded in establishing long-standing programmes such as the hotline and its legal and social support services for women, sustaining these core services remains a significant challenge. These programmes are not temporary projects, they are essential lifelines for many women. However, donors often prioritise funding new or “innovative” projects, overlooking the ongoing importance of existing services. This creates a major gap. Many women who participate in JWU’s awareness-raising campaigns come to understand the violence they are experiencing for the first time. However, awareness alone is not enough. It is neither ethical nor responsible to raise women’s consciousness about their rights and the structures of violence they face, only to leave them with no support or

² This programme started recently and hence it is not included in the review. Also supported by KVINFO.

protection. The hotline, legal aid, and psychosocial services are the very tools women need to act on this new awareness and to seek safety, justice, and healing. When funding for these services is unstable, JWU is forced to stretch its limited resources to keep them running, often relying on staff commitment and community solidarity rather than reliable institutional support. This disconnect between donor priorities and the lived needs of women on the ground highlights a broader structural problem in development funding, one that undervalues care work, continuity, and the deep responsibility that comes with political education and feminist organising.

NGO LAW CHALLENGE

The changes imposed by the new NGO Law, mentioned earlier, were far more than mere bureaucratic adjustments, they form part of a deliberate, broader strategy of control. While presented as measures to formalise and regulate civil society, the law effectively serves to centralise authority, restrict grassroots autonomy, and curtail the political influence of organisations like JWU. One of the most significant practical barriers created by this law is the lengthy and unpredictable process for funding approval. Organisations face extended delays in securing permission to access or allocate funds, often stretching over months or even years. These delays cripple the ability of groups like JWU to respond flexibly and timely to community needs, forcing them to halt or scale back vital awareness campaigns, training, and support services.

This drawn-out funding approval process acts as a form of political control, designed to limit the scope and impact of feminist and grassroots organising. By restricting financial resources and imposing rigid oversight, the law effectively weakens the capacity of civil society actors to operate independently, forcing them to comply with restrictive frameworks that undermine their mission and the communities they serve. In this way, the NGO Law exemplifies how legal and financial instruments are used as tools of repression, shaping not only what organisations can do, but also what kind of social change is possible within the current political climate.

NAVIGATING POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL SURVIVAL

Another core strategic challenge JWU continues to face is how to engage with political issues that deeply affect women's lives, while also ensuring the organisation's survival in a restrictive political and funding environment. This tension was particularly evident during the period of the review, which coincided with the genocidal war against the Palestinian people in Gaza. As a feminist organisation rooted in regional realities and committed to justice, JWU could not remain silent in the face of mass killings, displacement, and the targeted destruction of Palestinian life. It recognised that such violence is political and gendered, with devastating and specific impacts on women, including the loss of family members and the collapse of basic social and health services. JWU's long-standing approach has been to analyse women's issues within their broader socio-political and regional context, resisting the push to isolate "women's rights" from larger struggles for justice and liberation.

However, taking a clear position on Palestine, as JWU has done consistently, comes with serious risks. In a political climate where civil society space is shrinking, and where government scrutiny of NGOs is intensifying, speaking out can endanger the organisation's legal and operational status. Moreover, some international donors tend to depoliticise gender work and may view such political engagement, especially on Palestine, as "controversial" or

beyond the scope of “acceptable” programming. This puts JWU in a difficult position: choosing silence to protect its funding and registration or standing firm in its values and risking institutional backlash. JWU has chosen the latter, maintained its political clarity while constantly negotiated the boundaries of what is possible. This balancing act remains one of its most pressing strategic challenges, as it attempts to preserve both its integrity and its capacity to serve women on the ground.

NAVIGATING POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN A DEMOCRATIC ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

As JWU grows, it faces the challenge of balancing its democratic, grassroots roots with an expanding professional team managing more projects and services. From interviews and conversations with members and staff, it is clear this balancing is an ongoing process of negotiation, one that reflects the real tensions many feminist organisations experience. Historically, JWU has been a membership-based union with strong grassroots participation and democratically elected leadership. This democratic foundation is central to its political identity and collective organising. But with the increase in programmes and external partnerships, JWU now includes many salaried social workers, lawyers, coordinators, and administrators as the work required cannot be done on voluntary basis.

From what participants shared, the relationship between the elected leadership (the “union arm”) and professional management (the “institutional arm”) requires constant dialogue to maintain transparency, shared vision, and accountability. Balancing political organising with service delivery is not easy, especially when project demands, donor reporting, and bureaucracy threaten to overshadow the activist spirit that defines JWU. The women and staff described how JWU is actively working to maintain a structure that honours both arms so strategic decisions stay rooted in feminist values, and professional roles support rather than dilute the political mission. This means the challenge is continuously to foster open conversations, internal learning, and horizontal communication to share power across all levels.

FINAL REMARKS AND THE WAY FORWARD:

This review has been an invitation to look closely at how systemic change can emerge from the ground up, through the persistent, political, and collective work of women organising in their communities. At the heart of it was a central inquiry: *To what extent does JWU’s grassroots engagement with individuals contribute to wider structural transformation?*

Answering this required moving beyond conventional monitoring frameworks that often centre external validation, power hierarchies, and depoliticised indicators. Instead, the review turned to a decolonial feminist lens, one that locates change in shifts in power, meaning, and presence. Change here is understood as deeply relational: grounded in women’s lived realities, shaped by context, and co-produced through political trust.

This review centred feminist theory not as an add-on but as a tool for practice. Drawing on Nancy Fraser’s dimensions of justice—redistribution, recognition, and representation—alongside Naila Kabeer’s focus on agency and access to resources, and rooted in intersectional analysis, it traced how JWU’s work at the community level contributes to larger

social and political transformations. These frameworks helped translate complex, often invisible forms of change, such as voice, access, dignity, and belonging, into analytical clarity.

What emerged is that JWU's grassroots work is a feminist strategy for justice. The hotline, legal support, leadership training, and advocacy and awareness raising campaigns are not isolated interventions, nor a service delivery model, but part of a larger political project that seeks to challenge how violence, inequality, and marginalisation are structured and normalised. Redistribution is about creating pathways for survival and dignity. Recognition is not symbolic it is about legitimising women's experiences as political knowledge. Representation is not about numbers, it is about redefining who gets to shape the public and under what terms.

Women reached by JWU are not framed as "beneficiaries" or "victims" in need of saving. They are political actors in their own right. This is evident in the way JWU nurtures agency through legal education, political participation, and feminist consciousness. The review also highlights that this empowerment is not done *to* women but is shaped *with* them, in spaces built on trust, care, and shared purpose.

However, a key insight from the review is that JWU's commitment to intersectionality—while strong in its political vision—must be further embedded structurally. The inclusion of refugee women, women with disabilities, and those in remote areas is happening, but often within generalised programming. To fully honour its intersectional feminist ethos, JWU must intentionally differentiate needs, design inclusive strategies, and allow those most marginalised to actively shape the services they receive. Intersectionality, as the review shows, is not a checklist—it is a structural commitment that must shape programme design, data systems, evaluation tools, and everyday organisational practice.

At the same time, JWU is navigating deep contradictions—between political courage and donor expectations, between grassroots activism and professional structures, between historical legacies and emerging threats like digital violence. These tensions reflect the reality of feminist organising in a context shaped by colonial repression, shrinking civic space, and globalised funding regimes that often demand depoliticised compliance. Yet JWU continues to hold the line—speaking out on Palestine, sustaining services during crises, and insisting on local feminist knowledge in the face of imported solutions.

This review has not simply evaluated JWU—it has listened to it. Through reports, conversations, and the voices of women across branches and roles, it has engaged in a political dialogue about what justice, freedom, and feminist work can look like when rooted in struggle rather than strategy alone. The road ahead will require structural reflection: building internal systems that match the strength of its political commitments, securing sustainable resources without compromising values, and continuing to centre those most excluded in shaping the way forward. But JWU already has what many organisations seek—a deep reservoir of trust, political clarity, and lived feminist practice.

Ultimately, the question of how individual-level work contributes to systemic change is answered in practice, not in theory alone. JWU's work from 2017 to 2022 demonstrates that systemic change is not a distant goal—it is already happening in the quiet interventions, the

collective demands, and the refusal to separate care from politics. Change does not come from above—it is built, piece by piece, from below. And JWU's work reminds us that the grassroots is not the end-point of aid delivery; it is the starting point of feminist transformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As emphasised earlier, this review emerged through conversations with those who carry the daily work of feminist organising staff, branch members, social workers and lawyers, and leadership. It is not a technical evaluation nor an external judgment. It is a moment of collective reflection, grounded in the belief that feminist organisations, especially in this region, already know what they need. They do not lack vision, what they often lack is political space, sustainable support, and recognition of the depth of their work.

The following recommendations do not imply that these issues are new or overlooked. They do not aim to instruct or correct. JWU is already engaging with these strategic questions of how to protect core services like the hotline and legal support, how to respond to new forms of violence in digital spaces, how to maintain a democratic structure while growing, and how to build youth leadership in a shifting political climate. Instead, they are shared to emphasise the importance of that ongoing work. They are offered in solidarity as tools for continued reflection, strategy, and resistance. They take seriously the idea that feminist work is political, that it cannot be reduced to projects, and that organisations like JWU are not recipients of knowledge, but producers of it.

1. SECURE CORE FUNDING FOR ESSENTIAL SERVICES

- * Advocate for and seek long-term, flexible funding that supports JWU's core programmes, such as the hotline, legal aid, and psychosocial support services.
- * Engage donors in dialogue about the ethical responsibility to fund services that accompany awareness-raising and political education to ensure that women are not left with knowledge but no tools for action.
- * Develop a sustainability plan to reduce dependency on short-term, project-based funding, including exploring local fundraising strategies or solidarity-based models.

2. STRENGTHEN ORGANISATIONAL COHERENCE BETWEEN THE POLITICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ARMS

- * Facilitate regular internal dialogues between the elected leadership and management staff (institutional arm) to build mutual understanding, clarify roles, and maintain a shared political vision.
- * Develop internal political education programmes to support staff, especially those not rooted in activism, in understanding the feminist and political identity of JWU.
- * Create participatory spaces where both activists and professionals contribute to strategic planning and programmatic decisions.

3. MAINTAIN POLITICAL CLARITY WHILE MANAGING RISK

- * Continue JWU's principled stance on regional issues like Palestine, while also developing risk management strategies that safeguard the organisation's legal and operational existence.
- * Build alliances with other feminist and human rights groups to amplify collective voice and offer protection when taking political positions.
- * Document and publicly share the impact of political instability in the region and continuity of occupation and western states' intervention in the region on women's lives to make the feminist case for political engagement clear to funders and policymakers.

4. DEVELOP A STRATEGIC APPROACH TO TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV (TFGBV)

- * Expand and resource the new digital GBV (TFGBV) programme, ensuring it includes prevention, awareness, legal support, and digital literacy.
- * Engage with tech platforms, legal experts, and other feminist organisations to develop localised strategies for digital safety and advocacy.
- * Train staff and partners on recognising and responding to new forms of online violence, particularly those affecting young women and girls.

5. CHALLENGE DONOR-DRIVEN AGENDAS THROUGH FEMINIST NEGOTIATION

- * Advocate for feminist funding principles that value continuity, care work, and political organising — not just “innovation” or quantifiable outcomes.
- * Build donor awareness about the regional context, the intersection of politics and gender, and the ethical risks of depoliticised funding models.
- * Consider creating a donor engagement toolkit that clearly communicates JWU's values, priorities, and red lines.

6. DOCUMENT AND SHARE JWU'S MODEL AS A FEMINIST PRACTICE

- * JWU has rich experience in sustaining feminist work under pressure. Documenting its history, strategies, and lessons learned can offer valuable tools for others in the region and beyond.
- * Consider producing reflective materials (reports, stories, videos) that centre women's voices and share JWU's decolonial and political feminist approach.

7. CONTINUE FEMINIST THEORIES COURSES FOR STAFF AND MEMBERS AND CONTRIBUTE THROUGH RESEARCH TO FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE MAKING:

- * By creating spaces where staff can reflect critically on their work and link it to broader feminist thought, JWU can contribute meaningfully to feminist knowledge production from the Global South. There is still little written about the everyday practices of frontline feminist workers in the Arab world. JWU's model, which is built from experience, care, and collective struggle offers a rich source of insight. Bridging practice with theory not only strengthens internal political consciousness but also challenges dominant, Western-centric narratives about what feminist work looks like and where it comes from.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

INTERVIEWS' QUESTIONS

Participant Role	Key Themes Raised	Analytical Lens	Feminist /Decolonial Insight
Senior Management (1)	* Vision of social justice movement * Linking secularism, feminism, and constitutional change * Need to engage political parties and grassroots	* Representation (Fraser) * Strategic agency (Kabeer) * Political capabilities (Sen)	Pushes feminist politics beyond service delivery; identifies the state as a site of contestation
Project Managers (3)	* Challenges of linking donor goals with feminist values * Training as political consciousness-raising * Grassroots mobilisation methods	* Capabilities (Sen) * Redistribution (Fraser) * Lived agency (Kabeer)	Reflect tension between institutional structures and radical feminist goals; highlight the role of feminist pedagogy
Legal Committee Members (2)	* Legal reform priorities (electoral law, personal status law) * Struggles in engaging conservative actors * Use of model law as tool of	* Recognition & Representation (Fraser) * Strategic agency (Kabeer) * Intersectionality (refugee/legal status)	Law not as neutral, but as a contested site; legal work framed as a political and feminist practice

	resistance		
Hotline Lawyers (2)	* Legal illiteracy among women * Challenges navigating courts and protection systems * State complicity in violence	* Redistribution (access to legal justice) * Capabilities (freedom from violence) * Intersectionality	Legal empowerment seen as foundational to political agency; frontline resistance to institutionalised structural violence
Hotline Social Workers (2)	* Emotional and physical exhaustion * Gendered nature of care work * Building trust with survivors under fear and stigma	* Recognition (gendered roles of care) * Capabilities (dignity, safety) * Feminist labour politics	Highlights invisible feminised labour of care and emotional work as form of feminist resistance

APPENDIX 2:

FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK:

Theme	Sub-questions	Theoretical Link
Material Change	Has access to income, services, or safety improved?	Fraser – Redistribution
Shifting Norms and Belonging	Have perceptions of women's roles changed? Do women feel more respected?	Fraser – Recognition
Participation and Voice	Are women now involved in politics, activism, or decision-making?	Fraser – Representation

New Choices and Confidence	What life choices can women now make that they couldn't before?	Sen/Kabeer – Capabilities & Agency
Resistance to Oppression	Are women actively challenging gender roles, violence, or exclusion?	Kabeer – Strategic Agency
Intersecting Inequalities	How do class, refugee status, or other identities shape their experience of empowerment or exclusion?	Intersectionality
Local Knowledge and Movement	How do women understand empowerment in their own terms? Are local feminist values shaping the agenda?	Decolonial Feminist Lens
Institutional Power	Do women feel ownership over JWU's work? Is it shaped by local needs or donor priorities?	Decolonial Critique of Development

INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK:

Participant Group	Related JWU Programme(s)	Key Themes from Interviews	Analytical Focus
Senior Management (1)	Cross-cutting strategy- Feminist political engagement- Electoral law reform	Vision for social justice movement; secularism and feminism; building political alliances	Fraser (Representation) Sen/Kabeer (Strategic agency) Decolonial feminist lens
Project Managers (3)		Programme design; political education;	Fraser (Redistribution, Representation)

	Electoral awareness & training- Capacity building for CBOs- Public legal education	donor vs grassroots priorities	Sen (Capabilities) Kabeer (Agency)
Legal Committee (2)	Legal reform & advocacy (electoral law, personal status law)- Legal literacy courses	Feminist legal strategies; obstacles to reform; engaging state institutions	Fraser (Recognition, Representation) Intersectionality (e.g. class, status, gender)
Hotline Lawyers (2)	GBV protection services- Legal aid and access to justice- Awareness sessions on electoral and personal status law	Legal support and survivor protection; training community on legal rights and political participation	Fraser (Redistribution, Recognition) Sen (Legal capabilities) Kabeer (Empowerment through justice and knowledge)
Hotline Social Workers (2)	Shelter and safe spaces- Hotline support- Community-based protection- Awareness campaigns on women's rights and political participation	Emotional care work; GBV response; community legal training and engagement	Fraser (Recognition, Representation) Kabeer (Everyday and collective agency) Intersectionality
Community Social Worker (Hitteen) (1)	Awareness campaigns in refugee settings- Public participation and	Legal and political exclusion; raising awareness in camp setting; community mobilisation	Fraser (Redistribution, Recognition) Kabeer (Collective agency)

	GBV education in marginalised areas		Intersectionality (refugee, gender)
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APPENDIX 3:

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR JWU PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION STAFF

1. ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

- * Can you describe how you engage with individuals and communities around GBV, child marriage, and PSL issues?
- * How do you ensure that women from diverse backgrounds (e.g., refugees, rural women, different age groups) feel included and heard?
- * What strategies or tools have you found most effective in raising awareness and fostering dialogue?

2. ADDRESSING INTERSECTIONALITY AND POWER DYNAMICS

- * In your work, what are some of the intersecting barriers women face when accessing services or support? (e.g., class, religion, location)
- * How do you adapt your approaches to meet the needs of these different groups?
- * Can you share an example where recognizing these differences changed the way you worked with a community or individual

3. BUILDING CAPABILITIES AND EMPOWERMENT

- * How does your work help women gain new skills, knowledge, or confidence to make choices about their lives?
- * What changes have you witnessed in women's ability to assert their rights or resist harmful practices?
- * How do you support women in overcoming fear, stigma, or social pressure during your interventions?

4. PARTICIPATORY AND FEMINIST ORGANISING PRACTICES

- * How/do do you involve participants as co-creators of knowledge or solutions in your programmes?
- * What role do women's voices and lived experiences play in shaping programme activities?
- * How do you facilitate spaces where women can express agency and leadership?

5. MONITORING AND LEARNING

- * How do you track changes or progress at the individual or community level?
- * What feedback mechanisms exist for participants to share their experiences and suggestions?
- * Can you give an example of how participants feedback influenced your work on the ground?

6. REFLECTIONS ON IMPACT AND CHALLENGES

- * What do you consider the most significant changes brought about by your work?
- * What are the biggest challenges or obstacles you face in implementing these programmes?
- * How do you personally stay motivated and resilient in this work?



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