

Men's Participation in Jordan's Early Childhood Education and Care Sector: Barriers, Opportunities, and Policy Directions



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Abstract

This paper examines men's participation in Jordan's paid care economy, focusing on early childhood education and care (ECEC), a sector historically dominated by women. It investigates the social, cultural, and structural barriers limiting male involvement, including gender norms, parental expectations, limited career pathways, and professionalisation gaps. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines literature review, key informant interviews with policymakers and educators, and a survey of public attitudes to provide a comprehensive understanding of factors shaping male engagement. Findings reveal that societal perceptions are the primary obstacle, while professionalisation, improved working conditions, and targeted policies could attract more men to the sector. The paper underscores the potential benefits of increased male participation, including workforce diversification, enhanced service quality, and more equitable distribution of care work. Policy recommendations emphasise training, certification, awareness campaigns, and incentives aligned with Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision to promote gender-inclusive workforce development.

الملخص

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية واقع مشاركة الرجال في قطاع الرعاية المدفوعة الأجر في الأردن، مع التركيز خاص على قطاع التعليم والرعاية في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة، وهو قطاع يهيمن عليه النساء تارخياً. وتسعى الورقة إلى تحليل المعوقات الاجتماعية والثقافية والمهنية التي تحد من انخراط الرجال في هذا المجال، بما في ذلك الأعراف الجندرية السائدة، وتوقعات أولياء الأمور، وحدودية المسارات المهنية، وفجوات التدريب والتطوير المهني.

وتعتمد الدراسة منهجية بحثية مختلطة الأساليب، تجمع بين مراجعة الأدبيات ذات الصلة، وإجراء مقابلات مع خبراء في مجال السياسات العامة والتربية، إلى جانب استطلاع آراء المواطنين، بما يتيح فهماً معمقاً وشاملاً للعوامل المؤثرة في مشاركة الرجال في هذا القطاع. وتشير النتائج إلى أن التصورات المجتمعية السائدة تمثل العائق الأبرز أمام مشاركة الرجال، في حين يُظهر البحث أن تعزيز فرص التطوير المهني، وتحسين ظروف العمل، وتبني سياسات موجهة يمكن أن يسهم في استقطاب عدد أكبر من الرجال.

وتبرز الورقة الفوائد المحتملة لزيادة مشاركة الرجال في قطاع التعليم والرعاية في مرحلة الطفولة المبكرة، بما في ذلك تنويع القوى العاملة، وتحسين جودة الخدمات المقدمة، والمساهمة في توزيع أكثر عدالة لأعمال الرعاية. وتخلص الورقة إلى مجموعة من التوصيات السياساتية التي تركز على التدريب المهني، ونظم الشهادات، وحملات التوعية، وتوفير الحوافز، بما يتماشى مع رؤية التحديث الاقتصادي في الأردن، وبهدف دعم تنمية قوى عاملة شمولية ومراعية لاحتياجات الجنسين.

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1 Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) refer to the provision of education and care for children prior to entering primary school. It encompasses formal regulated settings (e.g. kindergarten, nursery or preschool, and regulated home-based care), formal unregulated settings (e.g., nannies) and informal care (e.g., by a relative).¹ In Jordan, the early childhood stage includes services provided to children from birth to nine years of age and is divided into three main stages: first, nursery for children from day one to the age of four years; second, the first stage of kindergarten from the age of four to five; and third, the second stage of kindergarten from the age of five until the age of six. Primary education then covers the first three grades.²

Jordan's ECEC sector remains markedly feminised,³ with women occupying nearly all direct care and teaching roles in kindergartens and nurseries, many of whom hold university or community college degrees.⁴ Their concentration in the sector is rooted in longstanding social expectations that caregiving, particularly for young children, is inherently women's work.⁵ Despite this, professional pathways remain uneven, with inconsistent pre-service preparation and limited opportunities for structured career progression.⁶ Moreover, the sector is characterised as undervalued and under-rewarded, reflecting the typical conditions of gender-segregated occupations dominated by women.⁷ Men are largely absent from the sector, and their limited participation is shaped by both cultural perceptions of early childhood spaces as unsuitable for men and concerns around children's safety,⁸ which continue to reinforce the sector's feminised identity.

International frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) promote equitable recognition of care work and shared responsibility between women and men. However, this agenda has gained limited momentum in Jordan's labour market and policy environment.

The underrepresentation of men in ECEC is not only a reflection of traditional gender norms but also a missed opportunity to strengthen professional standards, diversify the workforce, and

¹ OECD. 2025. "Reducing Inequalities by Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care: Starting Strong." Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/b78f8b25-en>.

² National Team for Early Childhood Development. 2000. "Early Childhood Development Strategy in Jordan." (Amman: NCFA) https://ncfa.org.jo/ebv4.0/root_storage/en/eb_list_page/early_childhood_development_strategy_in_jordan.pdf.

³ Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD). No date. "The Second Strategic Research Model on Working Conditions of Early Childhood Educators in Nurseries and Kindergartens." <https://www.anecd.net/article/the-second-strategic-research-model-on-working-conditions-of-early-childhood-educators-in-nurseries-and-kindergartens/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Eliana Carranza, Smita Das, and Aphichoke Kotikula. 2018. "Gender-Based Employment Segregation: Understanding Causes and Policy Interventions." World Bank, Washington, DC. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/483621554129720460/pdf/Gender-Based-Employment-Segregation-Understanding-Causes-and-Policy-Interventions.pdf>.

⁸ Jamal Ahmad, Eman Al-Zboon, Mustafa Alkhawaldeh, and Amal Khatib. 2017. "Jordanian Mothers' and Female Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Men Working in Preschools." *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 26(1), 77-91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826517729507>

reshape societal expectations surrounding caregiving. Encouraging greater male participation could contribute to a more gender-balanced sector⁹, challenge stereotypes about men in care roles,¹⁰ and raise the overall status of ECEC occupations.¹¹ Improved gender balance in ECEC would also be beneficial for children, offering them an environment that is more representative of society in general and facilitating exposure to role models for positive forms of masculinity.¹²

The paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the key societal, cultural, and structural barriers to men's participation in the ECEC sector in Jordan?
- How do stakeholders – including policymakers, regulators, and the public – perceive male involvement in the ECEC sector?
- What strategies and policies could support increased male engagement in the sector in line with Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision?

This paper thus explores the interplay of structural, regulatory, and cultural factors that maintain gendered labour patterns in the ECEC sector in Jordan. It applies a mixed-methods approach that includes a review of national policies and literature, key informant interviews with policymakers and regulators, and a survey of public attitudes toward men working in early childhood settings. Together, these methods provide a multidimensional understanding of how institutional conditions, workforce pathways, and societal perceptions interact to shape access to the profession and reinforce its feminised character.

The study aligns closely with the objectives and strategic goals of Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV), which seeks to expand labour force participation and reduce barriers to women's and men's employment while strengthening human capital.¹³ The EMV recognises the ECEC as a priority sector that is essential for supporting children's development. However, it also notes that the current system remains limited in reach, uneven in quality, and fragmented.¹⁴ The EMV emphasises the need for coordinated improvements, including better data and evidence, strengthened workforce recruitment and training, more robust governance and licensing arrangements, and increased public awareness of the sector's importance.¹⁵

From this perspective, transforming the care economy is both a social and economic priority. A more professionalised ECEC sector, supported by clearer qualification standards, improved working conditions, and greater public recognition, can enhance service quality and create more secure and attractive employment opportunities.¹⁶

⁹ Barnardos. 2023. "ChildLinks Issue 2: Men in Early Childhood Education and Care." <https://knowledge.barnardos.ie/handle/20.500.13085/1244>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Margarita Torre. 2018. "Men's Entry and Exit from Female-Dominated Occupations." <http://www.wipsociology.org/2018/10/22/mens-entry-and-exit-from-female-dominated-occupations/>.

¹² Barnardos. 2023. "ChildLinks Issue 2: Men in Early Childhood Education and Care." <https://knowledge.barnardos.ie/handle/20.500.13085/1244>.

¹³ EMV's one of two main pillars "Economic growth – new economic opportunities for all, unleashing our full economic potential", <https://www.jordanvision.jo/img/vision-en.pdf>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ European Commission. 2020. "Early Childhood Education and Care: How to Recruit, Train, and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff."

At the same time, increasing men's engagement in ECEC may contribute to a more equitable distribution of unpaid domestic work, reduce occupational segregation, and help shift public attitudes about caregiving roles.

Expanding and professionalising ECEC services also has significant implications for job creation in a labour market characterised by high unemployment, particularly among youth. Addressing obstacles to male entry can inform wider discussions on labour regulation and human capital development. Overall, the paper positions greater male participation in ECEC as a potential pathway for advancing gender equality, improving workforce sustainability, and supporting a more inclusive and resilient economic model in Jordan.

Unless otherwise specified, this paper uses “ECEC” to refer exclusively to formal and regulated settings serving children from birth to the age of six years (nursery and preschool education stage), as recognised under the current Jordanian regulatory framework.^{18 17} These settings represent the entry point to the education system and play a critical role in shaping developmental outcomes and future educational trajectories.

2 Jordan's ECEC: Overview of Governance and Organisation

Jordan's ECEC landscape is shaped by a dual regulatory system in which the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) licenses nurseries for children under four, while the Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees kindergartens in the year preceding primary school.¹⁹ Licensing requirements – for nurseries and kindergartens – define standards for staffing, infrastructure, and child safety, and recent regulations for home-based nurseries seek to expand coverage and bring small-scale provision into the formal system. ECEC services are delivered through a mix of public, private, and civil society providers, though access remains uneven.²⁰ Pre-primary education is not mandated, although the MoE offers KG2 classes for five-year-olds; but they are not sufficient to serve all children.²¹ Public kindergartens and workplace-based nurseries are concentrated in urban centres and government institutions, while the private sector operates the majority of licensed facilities. However, a substantial portion of pre-primary provision remains outside of MoE oversight via unlicensed providers, meaning that official enrolment figures underestimate the extent of service provision.²²

https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInfancia/documentos/early_childhood_and_care_-_how_to_recruit_train_and_motivate_well-qualified_staff.pdf.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education. “Kindergarten Regulations No. 2 of 1980.” Ministry of Education. Jordan. Translated by Oraib Abu-Raideh. <https://moe.gov.jo/ar/node/15774>.

¹⁸ Ministry of Social Development. No date. “Nursery Bylaw No. 6 of 2024.” Ministry of Social Development. Jordan. <https://tinyurl.com/5cu7r3w6>.

¹⁹ World Bank. 2024. “Formal Childcare in Jordan: Limited Services and Unmet Demand.” Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

<https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099062524142022514>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

International partners also contribute to system development, providing technical and financial support for policy, workforce strengthening, and service expansion.

These institutional arrangements are critical to understanding how labour structures and workforce norms have developed. Despite the sector's central importance for children's development and school readiness, working conditions for ECEC staff remain weak. Most educators are young women, many without specialised early childhood training,²³ and the predominance of privately run centres, with limited strategic regulation or investment, results in low wages, limited career progression, and inadequate professional support.²⁴ ²⁵ Public concerns about service quality and professional standards further shape workforce morale and retention.²⁶

Cultural expectations continue to frame caregiving as a feminine domain, discouraging men from entering or remaining in the profession. Barriers include social stigma and limited training pathways.²⁷

In rural areas, gaps in service availability and workforce development opportunities further compound these challenges. Yet scaling up and professionalising ECEC holds significant potential for job creation and for diversifying employment opportunities,²⁸ aligning with national development strategies that seek to enhance labour market participation and reduce gendered occupational segregation.

Understanding how regulatory frameworks, workforce conditions, and social perceptions intersect is therefore essential to assessing both the challenges and the opportunities for expanding male engagement in Jordan's ECEC sector.

²³ Arab Network for Early Childhood (ANECD). No date. "The Second Strategic Research Model on Working Conditions of Early Childhood Educators in Nurseries and Kindergartens." <https://www.anecd.net/article/the-second-strategic-research-model-on-working-conditions-of-early-childhood-educators-in-nurseries-and-kindergartens/>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ İpek İlkkaracan, Ayşe Aylin Bayar, Luiza Nassif Pires, Tom Masterson, and Ajit Zacharias. 2022. "Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Jordan: An Assessment of Costs and Returns." https://levyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/jordan_rpr_5_25.pdf.

²⁶ Sama Consulting. 2024. Early Childhood Care in Jordan: Community Perceptions and Practices. https://samaconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Sama_Early-Childhood-Care-in-Jordan-Community-Perceptions-Practices_EN-2.pdf.

²⁷ Jamal Ahmad, Eman Al-Zboon, Mustafa Alkhawaldeh, and Amal Khatib. 2017. "Jordanian Mothers' and Female Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of Men Working in Preschools." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 26 (2017): article 106082651772950, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319630761_Jordanian_Mothers'_and_Female_Preschool_Teachers'_Perceptions_of_Men_Working_in_Preschools.

²⁸ İpek İlkkaracan, Ayşe Aylin Bayar, Luiza Nassif Pires, Tom Masterson, and Ajit Zacharias. 2022. "Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care Services in Jordan: An Assessment of Costs and Returns." https://levyinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/jordan_rpr_5_25.pdf.

3 Professionalising the ECEC Sector

Professionalisation of the ECEC workforce has emerged internationally as a key strategy for improving service quality, elevating workforce status, and generating social and economic benefits.²⁹ Across multiple contexts, the focus has been on formalising qualifications, establishing clear training pathways, creating career progression opportunities, improving working conditions, and providing professional recognition.^{30 31 32} In highly feminised sectors, professionalisation not only strengthens competence and retention but also helps reposition ECEC as a respected occupation rather than an extension of unpaid domestic work.

International evidence highlights several core elements of professionalisation. Standardised pre-service and in-service training, competency frameworks, and certification systems provide clear benchmarks for knowledge and skills while motivating staff through structured career pathways.³³ Improved wages, leadership roles, reasonable child-to-staff ratios, and supportive working conditions enhance job satisfaction and retention.³⁴

Public recognition and professional associations contribute to the social legitimacy of the occupation, fostering broader societal respect for early childhood educators.³⁵ Targeted strategies to recruit underrepresented groups, including men, have been successfully implemented in countries such as Germany, Denmark, and the United Kingdom,³⁶ demonstrating that professionalisation can also be a lever to address gender imbalances.

In Jordan, the professionalisation of ECEC is increasingly recognised as essential to improving quality, attracting and retaining qualified staff, and creating sustainable workforce development.^{37 38} By establishing formal training and certification, defining career pathways, improving working conditions, and enhancing societal recognition, professionalisation can elevate the status of ECEC, diversify the workforce, and contribute to inclusive economic growth. Aligning these efforts with national strategies, such as Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision, positions professionalisation as both a social and economic priority, ensuring that the sector delivers high-quality education and care while providing meaningful and respected careers for educators.

²⁹ European Commission. 2020. "Early Childhood Education and Care: How to Recruit, Train, and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff." https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInfancia/documentos/early_childhood_and_care_-_how_to_recruit_train_and_motivate_well-qualified_staff.pdf.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Peter Moss. 2006. "Structures, Understandings and Discourses: Possibilities for Re-Envisioning the Early Childhood Worker." *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 7, no. 1 (2006): 30–45. <https://doi.org/10.2304/ciec.2006.7.1.30>.

³² Susan Irvine, Jo Lunn, Jennifer Sumsion, Elena Jansen, Victoria Sullivan, and Karen Thorpe. 2023. "Professionalization and Professionalism: Quality Improvement in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 52 (2024): 1911–1922, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-023-01531-6>.

³³ European Commission. 2020. "Early Childhood Education and Care: How to Recruit, Train, and Motivate Well-Qualified Staff." https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/EInfancia/documentos/early_childhood_and_care_-_how_to_recruit_train_and_motivate_well-qualified_staff.pdf.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA). No date. "QRTA launches the first phase of the 'Professional Development Program for Kindergarten Teachers.'" Accessed November 26, 2025, <https://qrtta.edu.jo/en/news/820>.

³⁸ International Rescue Committee. 2024. "Jordan Introduces Landmark National Childcare Policy to Empower Families and Boost Economy." Accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/jordan-introduces-landmark-national-childcare-policy-empower-families-and-boost>.

4 Methodology

The paper adopted a mixed-methods approach to explore institutional barriers and public attitudes towards male participation in Jordan's ECEC sector. The secondary data included academic studies, national policy frameworks such as the EMV, and international references, including the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).³⁹ Analysis of secondary data established the contextual foundation of the research, identified existing knowledge gaps, and informed the design of the primary data collection tools.

Primary data included five semi-structured Key Informant Interviews. Participants included ECEC educators and training providers from the University of Jordan (UoJ) and the Vocational Training Corporation (VTC), as well as policy-makers and regulators from the MoE and the MoSD.

These interviews explored institutional and policy environments, cultural expectations, and enabling factors that might support greater male involvement in ECEC. The data were examined through thematic content analysis, which allowed recurring perceptions, patterns, and dynamics to emerge, helping to build a grounded understanding of the systemic realities influencing the workforce.

To complement these insights, a quantitative standardised online survey was conducted to gauge public attitudes toward men working in early childhood settings. The survey reached 158 Jordanian adults –50 men and 107 women– from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and locations, representing both rural and urban regions across the twelve governorates, with the highest representation of respondents from Amman. It relied on a structured questionnaire designed to assess attitudes toward male caregivers, openness to their involvement in early childhood environments, and the public's awareness of policies and initiatives that support gender inclusion in the sector. The survey results were then considered alongside the qualitative data to identify opportunities and barriers within the policy, institutional, and social environment.

5 Findings: Gendered Norms and Attitudes and the Limited Participation of Men in Jordan's ECEC Sector

Interviews with participants reveal a consistent pattern of very limited male participation in Jordan's ECEC workforce. Participants consistently described a situation in which legal frameworks do not formally prevent men from working in leadership or ownership roles within childcare institutions. However, social and cultural expectations strongly constrain their involvement in direct caregiving. This was attributed to a long-standing association between nurturing and femininity, sensitivities around men working closely with young children, and the perception that nurseries and kindergartens are female-dominated spaces where male presence may be seen as socially inappropriate and “inconvenient”.

³⁹ See Appendix (1) to view national and international legal frameworks on ECEC.

A vocational expert, however, referenced SOS Children's Villages and orphan homes where men are directly engaged in caregiving to children at kindergarten age, citing larger facilities as a factor in recruiting and retaining male caregivers and educators.

The presence of a male manager in the nursery hinders the freedom of movement, and since he spends long hours in the nursery, the [female] caregivers will not have their freedom in moving around or interacting with the children – except in larger nurseries where the administration office is located far away, separate from the nursery.⁴⁰

Interviewees noted that recent regulatory developments, including the 2024 Nursery Bylaw,⁴¹ technically allows men to establish and own childcare facilities. Nevertheless, institutional practice continues to limit their presence in direct caregiving roles. Interviewees described this as an entrenched convention rather than a strictly legal restriction, but one that has practical implications for career pathways and reinforces the sector's gender imbalance.

Across interviews, social attitudes emerged as the most influential barrier. Participants highlighted that parental preferences, community expectations, and persistent gender stereotypes discourage men from studying or working in early childhood education. Higher education institutions were reported to have very low male enrolment in early childhood or primary education tracks, reflecting a wider belief that such roles lack professional status and are more suitable for women.

For men, early childhood is considered something specifically for women, so they do not pursue it. Although there is certainly a group in every society that has the ability to do this work, what prevents them is the culture of the society. Even if a man studies it, he does not work in childcare or in kindergartens; instead, he pursues postgraduate studies to become a university professor, because he considers that path more prestigious and financially beneficial than working in a kindergarten.⁴²

Several interviewees linked this feminisation of the sector to broader challenges, including low pay and weak professional recognition, which together reduce the attractiveness of ECEC careers for both men and women while further reinforcing gender segregation.

It is the parents who steer them in this direction, wanting their daughters to become teachers, as they consider the teaching profession better for a girl than any other job, such as working in a bank or in an organisation. This is because most, or even all, of this sector is female, so she only interacts with women like her within the school or within the kindergarten and nursery.

This is a significant factor.⁴³

⁴⁰ Key Informant (1). Translated by Oraib Abu-Raideh from the original Arabic.

⁴¹ Ministry of Social Development. No date. Nursery Bylaw No. 6 of 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/5cu7r3w6> (English translation unavailable).

⁴² Key Informant (2). Translated by Oraib Abu-Raideh from the original Arabic.

⁴³ Key Informant (2). Translated by Oraib Abu-Raideh from the original Arabic.

Despite these challenges, the interviewees also pointed to areas of opportunity. Several believed that increasing male participation could enrich children's learning experiences by offering diverse social and emotional role models and fostering more inclusive educational environments. Interviewees also referenced international examples, such as Germany, the United States, and Australia, where male educators have been successfully integrated into early childhood settings when supported by clear professional guidelines and strong communication with families. These examples were seen as evidence that male engagement can be normalised without compromising safety or educational quality.

There are no restrictions – neither social, nor religious, nor economic, nor anything. There is absolutely nothing. I'm sure there are many men who love teaching children. They definitely enjoy working with children, and I'm one of them.⁴⁴

Interviewees identified practical steps that could support positive change. Suggestions included professional certification requirements, targeted training and outreach for young men, communication campaigns to address parental concerns, and improving salaries and working conditions to make the profession more appealing overall. Several interviewees felt that increasing the sector's professional status would help shift cultural perceptions and position ECEC as a legitimate and valuable career path for both women and men.

The survey findings indicate that male participation in ECEC in Jordan remains limited, largely due to societal attitudes that frame caregiving as a female-dominated profession. Many respondents expressed a preference for women to work with young children and reported discomfort with male caregivers or teachers, as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below, reflecting the persistent social norm that early childhood care is women's work.

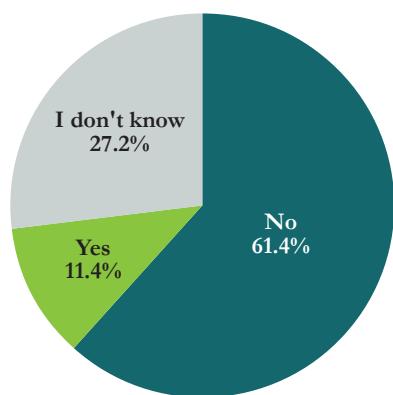


Figure 1. Would you feel comfortable if the caregiver for your child in the nursery were a man?

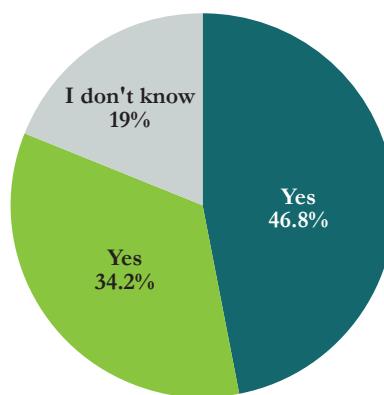
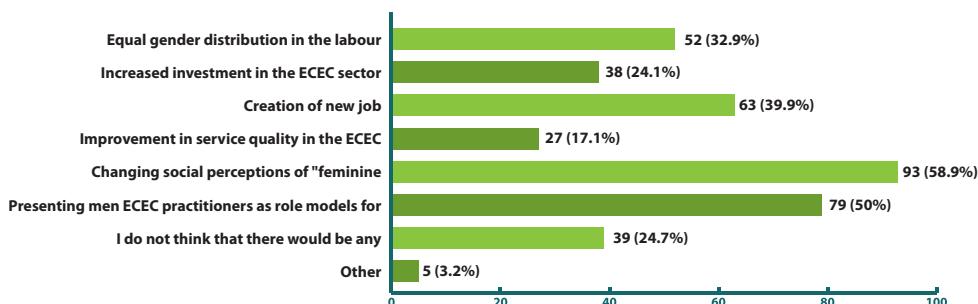


Figure 2. Would you feel comfortable if the caregiver for your child in kindergarten were a man?

⁴⁴ Key Informant (3). Translated by Oraib Abu-Raideh from the original Arabic.

Several barriers were identified as discouraging men from entering the sector. Child safety concerns, traditional social norms, and conventional gender expectations were cited as major obstacles. The lack of clear training pathways for men was also seen to influence career choices. Families' reluctance to accept male educators, particularly in nurseries serving very young children, reinforces these patterns.

Despite these challenges, respondents acknowledged potential benefits of increasing male participation, including exposure to diverse teaching styles and role models, and promoting a more balanced view of caregiving in society. There was notable support for policy interventions, such as targeted training programs, scholarships, and government-backed awareness campaigns designed to normalise male participation in ECEC (Figure 3).



Figures (3). Survey question: "Do you think that increasing the number of men working in early childhood education and care would contribute to: Please select all that apply."

Overall, the findings suggest that societal perceptions are the primary factor limiting male engagement in early childhood care. While structural conditions in the sector play a role, public attitudes strongly shape decisions made by families and potential entrants. The respondents expressed support for policy measures indicates that attitudes may be responsive to well-designed interventions that encourage men's participation.

6 Discussion

The findings highlight that male participation in Jordan's ECEC sector remains minimal, primarily due to societal perceptions that caregiving is a female responsibility. Families' discomfort with male caregivers and teachers underscores the persistence of these norms, particularly in nurseries serving very young children. These societal barriers interact with structural challenges, including a poor reward system and insufficient professional development opportunities for men, reinforcing low male engagement. Such constraints directly undermine the EMV's emphasis on aligning labour supply with market demand and strengthening high-potential sectors such as ECEC under the Smart Jordan priority areas.

Investment and professionalisation emerge as key policy levers to address these challenges. Enhancing wages, improving working conditions, establishing clear career trajectories, and providing targeted training can elevate the status of the ECEC workforce, making it a more attractive and viable career choice for men.

These measures are closely linked to the EMV's strategic goals of accommodating an additional one million men and women in the labour market, increasing income per capita by an average of 3% annually, and improving Jordan's ranking on the Global Competitiveness Index. Respondents also recognised potential benefits of increased male participation, such as diversifying teaching approaches, providing positive role models, and fostering a more balanced societal understanding of caregiving. These findings indicate that well-designed government interventions can shift both perceptions and career choices, aligning with EMV's foundational component of human capital development.

Policy-focused strategies that integrate awareness campaigns, scholarships, and professional development pathways offer the dual advantage of addressing societal norms while strengthening the quality and professionalism of the ECEC workforce. By linking male engagement to professionalisation, Jordan can strengthen a priority Smart Jordan sector, expand its skilled labour force, and advance the EMV's guiding principles of investment, competitiveness, and responsive labour market supply. Such interventions contribute not only to improved outcomes for children and educators, but also to sustained economic resilience and growth aligned with national development ambitions.

7 Policy Recommendations

The study proposes the following policy recommendations to strengthen the professionalisation of the ECEC sector in Jordan.

1) Invest in the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce.

Introduce structured pay scales, career progression criteria, and improved working conditions for all ECEC educators, with incentives to attract male candidates. This elevates the non-prestigious status of ECEC, strengthens the quality of care, and aligns with EMV objectives for human capital investment.

2) Establish professional development and certification programs.

MoSD and MoE, in collaboration with universities and vocational institutes, can develop specialised training tracks and certification programs for men and women entering ECEC. This promotes professionalisation, enhances career pathways, and elevates the status of the ECEC workforce, supporting EMV goals of workforce development and gender inclusion.

3) Implement a national awareness campaign to promote male participation in ECEC.

MoSD and MoE, in partnership with civil society organisations, can design and launch a campaign highlighting professional opportunities, male role models, and career pathways in ECEC. The campaign will address societal perceptions as a barrier to male engagement and positions ECEC as a professional and economically valuable career.

4) Provide scholarships and financial incentives for male candidates entering ECEC.

MoSD and MoE, in partnership with universities and private sector actors, can award scholarships to male students pursuing professional qualifications in ECEC. This reduces financial barriers, signals government investment in professionalising the sector, and encourages men to consider ECEC careers.

5) Develop a monitoring and evaluation system for effective participation and workforce professionalisation.

MoSD and MoE can establish a dedicated task force to collect and analyse data on male and female participation, professional development outcomes, career progression, and public acceptance. This supports evidence-based policymaking, ensuring that investments in professionalisation and male engagement yield measurable outcomes aligned with EMV objectives.

8 Conclusion

Male underrepresentation in Jordan's ECEC sector is largely driven by societal perceptions that frame early childhood care as women's work, reinforced by structural barriers such as limited career pathways and insufficient professional development opportunities. These factors collectively shape the decisions of families, current workers, and potential entrants, perpetuating low male participation.

However, the findings demonstrate that change is feasible through strategic government interventions. By investing in professionalisation (i.e. improving wages, working conditions, prospects for career progression and training) while promoting awareness and offering financial incentives, policymakers can attract more men to the sector. Such measures not only address gender imbalances but also elevate the status of ECEC, improve workforce quality, and align with the EMV's goals of workforce development, social inclusion, and economic modernisation.

Appendix:

National and International Frameworks

Level	Policy / Framework	Key Focus	Relevance to Topic
International	International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1994	Redefine traditional gender roles; involving men in caregiving for gender equality and family wellbeing.	Highlights men's role in caregiving, foundational for shifting norms about men in paid care work.
	Beijing Declaration Platform for Action 1995	Eliminate gender stereotypes; promote men's participation in caregiving and early childhood education (ECEC).	Calls for gender-transformative policies that encourage men's inclusion in care professions
	Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All (2000)	Expand and improve early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for disadvantaged children. Includes six regional frameworks for action, including for the Arab States.	Emphasises on expanding quality ECCE, highlights the need for a well-trained and diverse ECCE workforce, providing a policy basis for examining and promoting male engagement in the sector.
	Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Goal 5 & 8	Promote gender equality (Goal 5) and decent work/economic growth (Goal 8). Includes six regional frameworks for action, including for the Arab States.	Encourages dismantling occupational segregation and improving care work conditions, including men's engagement.
	International Labour Organization (ILO), UN Women Reports	Recognition of care economy as key to economic diversification and social protection; policy guidance.	Advocates for male inclusion in care roles and improvements in labor protections for all care workers.
National	Jordan Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV)	Increase labour market participation; expand and professionalise care economy; promote gender equality.	Identifies care economy as priority sector; supports reducing occupational segregation and boosting male participation in ECCE and care roles.
	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	Eliminate employment discrimination; promote gender equality in all sectors.	Provides legal framework mandating equal access to employment opportunities, including non-traditional roles for men in care.
	National Strategy for Women's Empowerment 2020 – 2025	Challenge gender stereotypes.	Supports policies that indirectly promote women's greater participation in the labour force.
	Jordanian National Strategy for Early Childhood Development (2009)	Create a coordinated system that supports children's holistic development from birth to early school age.	Emphasises professionalising the ECEC, opening the door to a more gender-balanced workforce.

Appendix:

National and International Frameworks

Level	Policy / Framework	Key Focus	Relevance to Topic
National	Jordan Early Childhood Education Executive Plan, 2016-2025	Aims to expand access to quality pre-primary education and strengthen the systems needed to ensure children enter school ready to learn.	Expanding and professionalising pre-primary education creates opportunities to diversify the workforce and encourage greater male participation in ECEC roles.
	Education Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022	Improves access, equity, and quality across all education levels, strengthen the education system, and develop a skilled and professional workforce.	Prioritises early childhood education and workforce development, providing a framework to promote gender diversity and support male participation in the ECEC sector.
	National Strategy for Human Resource Development	Aligning education and training with labour market needs to build a skilled and competitive workforce.	Provides a framework to professionalise ECEC and create opportunities for greater male participation in the sector.



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