

# A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Jord El-Qaytaa, Akkar Governorate

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الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية

In partnership with the  
Ministry of Social Affairs



UN-HABITAT



Ambasciata d'Italia  
Beirut

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# A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Jord El-Qaytaa, Akkar Governorate

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The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the United Nations agency for human settlements. It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. UN-Habitat's programmes are designed to help policymakers and local communities get to grips with human settlements and urban issues and find workable, lasting solutions.

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## Credits and acknowledgements

This booklet, which outlines strategic directions for the local socioeconomic development of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Jord El-Qaytaa, was made possible with the generous funding support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS), within the scope of the project "Improving Planning Capacities for Social and Economic Local Development" implemented between 2018 and 2023 by the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs.

UN-Habitat extends its gratitude to all individuals who participated in and contributed to the preparation and development of this booklet.

UN-Habitat gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of the Minister of Social Affairs and his team, thanking them for their support and close coordination in the field with social development centres (SDCs).

Particular recognition goes to the President of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa representatives of the union, Akkar SDC coordinators who supported in the facilitation of data collection, consultation sessions and analysis of the findings, and the members of a dedicated field team who supported in data collection.

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## Foreword by the Ministry of Social Affairs

The continuous fluctuations in the economic landscape in Lebanon have necessitated governmental institutions to rethink the forgoing socioeconomic model, which is based on the philosophy of rapid and temporary crisis response. With the increased pressing needs for social protection, aid and development, this obligates us to work towards meeting the expectations and the needs of the community relying on clear and prudent strategic planning that is realistically aligned with the available resources.

The Ministry of Social Affairs holds the responsibility and commitment of conducting developmental activities at all levels through its social developmental centres (SDCs). The ministry works in close coordination with international organizations, the local community, and local authorities.

Consequently, we seek the engagement and the involvement of relevant parties in our plans and our implementation procedures with the aim to jointly measure, evaluate and report on the performance of the ministry. This confirms our commitment to social responsibility, which contributes to achieving social stability and development.

Hence, we hereby share this booklet with you to present the analysis of data collected – and subsequently validated – with the participation of local stakeholders through different tools, including a survey with municipalities and a series of interviews and focus group discussions. The expected outcome of this exercise is to improve the socioeconomic conditions of communities and those concerned within the specified economic sectors in targeted municipalities and unions of municipalities. This will contribute to securing employment, job opportunities, skills development, and an enabling environment for entrepreneurial activities. This shall be undertaken through proper municipal planning developed in partnership with the SDCs and through the pursuit of possible funding for the implementation of such projects, yet ensuring the collaboration between the Ministry of Social Affairs, civil society organizations, and municipal councils.

**Dr. Hector Al-Hajjar**  
Minister of Social Affairs

## Foreword by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation

Knowing and analysing the resources and the challenges of the territory, planning in a participatory manner among public and private sectors and civil society organizations, designing sectorial strategies at local level where local and national level stakeholders are involved and prioritizing the interventions are a milestone before any intervention.

While this booklet is produced, Lebanon is facing one of the most severe economic and social crises: responding to individual needs is crucial, yet introducing reforms based on shared and agreed strategies is fundamental to ensure sustainability avoiding continuous adaption to emergencies.

In this context, the socio-economic focus given in developing the road map of the 10 Unions of Municipalities is really relevant. The adopted approach has enhanced the dialogue among the Unions of Municipalities, the Municipalities, the Social Development Centres of the Ministry Social of Affairs, the Lebanese Non-Governmental Organisations and stakeholders of the private sector.

The road map is the first step of a process towards interventions to be realised in the short-term and others bridging with long-terms strategies, whilst strengthening, orienting, and reforming the existing national systems.

The Italian Cooperation appreciates the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs in facilitating the process in collaboration with UN-Habitat. Italy has a longstanding cooperation with the Ministry in supporting the local development and welfare system for the provision of social services.

Italy looks forward to witnessing the continuity of the undertaken initiative through the concrete actions towards a local economic development.

**Ms. Alessandra Piermattei**  
Head of Office AICS Beirut

## Foreword by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in Lebanon

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is pleased to collaborate with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation to present a series of booklets that endeavours to capture the strategic directions of 10 unions of municipalities (UoMs) across Lebanon towards future socioeconomic development action planning. The directions, identified by the UoMs and local stakeholders themselves, through a bottom-up participatory approach, aim to point towards future potential socioeconomic action planning that can both mitigate and set a long-term vision for the response and recovery efforts to address the nationwide socioeconomic crisis at local levels.

At the time of writing, Lebanon continues to face numerous and deep protracted socioeconomic challenges; UoMs and municipalities are at the receiving end of their impact and equally at the forefront of a local response. These booklets compile an evidence base, as identified, and prioritized by UoMs, pointing towards the longer-term need to develop full-fledged socioeconomic action plans that target the needs of their communities across the sectors of health, education, agriculture, infrastructure, among others.

Each booklet provides findings and analyses undertaken by the local teams working at the level of each UoM related to the socioeconomic conditions of each UoM. The data and findings of the booklets were collected through a participatory approach, involving a variety of stakeholders, including the UoMs, municipalities, civil society organizations, academia, the private sector, and the Ministry of Social Affairs' social development centres (SDCs).

The booklets identify the socioeconomic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of each UoM, and provide a baseline that can be used to guide further resource investment by UoMs, municipalities and external stakeholders. Culminating with a series of recommendations for each UoM, the booklets provide insight into which specific sectors UoMs should focus on advancing, based on pre-existing efforts made, availability of natural resources, and feasibility. If adopted, these recommendations could help lead to enhanced basic and social service provision, increased livelihood opportunities, and ultimately promote local socioeconomic development and community well-being.

UN-Habitat hopes that these booklets will be a valuable resource for UoMs as they develop and implement future socioeconomic action plans to improve the lives of their communities.

**Taina Christiansen**  
Head of UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme

# Table of contents

Credits and acknowledgements .....	3	Overview of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Jord El-Qaytaa .....	16
Foreword by the Ministry of Social Affairs....	4	Geographical location and land cover/land use .....	16
Foreword by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.....	5	Population overview .....	20
Foreword by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in Lebanon .....	6	<b>Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement .....</b>	<b>21</b>
List of tables and figures .....	9	Water .....	21
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	9	Roads and transportation .....	21
Executive summary .....	10	Buildings and facilities .....	22
<b>Project overview .....</b>	<b>11</b>	Electricity.....	22
Project objectives .....	11	Sanitation .....	22
Expected outcomes .....	11	Solid waste management.....	23
Timeframe .....	11	Telecommunications .....	23
Geographical coverage.....	11	<b>Social services: Current state and recommendations for improvement .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Beneficiaries .....	11	Health care .....	23
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>11</b>	Education .....	24
Selection of UoMs.....	12	Culture and public spaces.....	25
Preparation and training.....	14		
Data collection, analysis and validation.....	15		

<b>Local economy and livelihoods:</b>	
<b>Current state .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Public sector .....	26
Private sector.....	26
Crafts and vocations .....	27
Agriculture.....	27
Industry .....	27
Trade.....	27
Tourism .....	27
Remittances from abroad.....	29
<b>Recommendations for sectors identified as key for future local socioeconomic development .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Agriculture.....	31
Tourism .....	34
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>

# List of tables and figures

<b>Table 1.</b> 10 UoMs selected under this project....	12
<b>Figure 1.</b> Location of 10 UoMs selected under this project .....	13
<b>Figure 2.</b> Stakeholders involved in the development of booklets as part of the project....	14
<b>Figure 3.</b> UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa with its municipalities .....	16
<b>Figure 4.</b> Digital elevation model (in metres) for the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.....	17
<b>Figure 5.</b> Satellite image of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.....	18
<b>Figure 6.</b> Land cover/land use as a percentage of the total area of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa .....	19
<b>Figure 7.</b> Land cover/land use within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.....	19
<b>Figure 8.</b> Distribution of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa's population by age .....	20
<b>Figure 9.</b> Distribution of employment by sector in the UoM of Jord El-QaytaaSource: Survey conducted with municipalities.....	26

# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>AICS</b>	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>CNRS-L</b>	National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon
<b>DEM</b>	Digital elevation model
<b>EDL</b>	Électricité du Liban
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic information system
<b>MoSA</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>SDC</b>	Social development centre
<b>SWaM</b>	Solid Waste Management in Jord El-Qaytaa
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
<b>ToT</b>	Training of trainers
<b>UN-Habitat</b>	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
<b>UoM</b>	Union of municipalities



## Executive summary

The preparation of this booklet, which outlines strategic directions of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Jord El-Qaytaa in Akkar Governorate towards future socioeconomic development action planning, was undertaken as part of a series of booklets prepared within the scope of the project **"Improving Planning Capacities for Social and Economic Local Development."** The project was implemented between 2018 and 2023 by the UN-Habitat Lebanon Country Programme in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs and funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS).

The analysis and recommendations included in this booklet are a result of several meetings, interviews, focus group discussions, and brainstorming sessions conducted by the project team, which was composed of representatives of social development centres (SDCs) and UoMs, in addition to a UN-Habitat team.

With the support of a local field team – also composed of representatives of SDCs, UoMs and UN-Habitat – that was involved in data collection, the project team collected and analysed data through fieldwork, which included consultative meetings and technical sessions with all relevant groups: stakeholders, experts, local activists, and individuals from various segments of the local community. The stages of data collection and validation at the local level involved collection of information about the municipalities; conducting consultative meetings, interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders and representatives of local communities; analysing the collected data through a participatory rapid appraisal approach that defined the status of different sectors; and finally, the representatives of SDCs and UoMs proposing recommendations for specific sectors to help improve the socioeconomic situation in each UoM.

In the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, the consultations showed that the basic and social services are becoming weak due to the ongoing socioeconomic and financial crisis, and most of the sectors have been impacted in a way that the local authorities are not able to operate or to maintain effectively. To be able to improve the socioeconomic situation in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, local stakeholders recommended to focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors. This was translated into strategic directions and a proposed road map for each of these sectors aimed at providing a vision for future action planning and interventions.

## Project overview

### Project objectives

The AICS-funded project as part of which this booklet was developed aimed to enhance the socioeconomic development conditions of local communities through strengthening the planning capacities at the level of unions of municipalities (UoMs) and municipalities, and by promoting collaboration between social development centres (SDCs) (affiliated to the Ministry of Social Affairs [MoSA]), local authorities and civil society organizations.

The scope of the project was adapted to meet the emerging needs of the country, to respond to the evolving socioeconomic, financial, and political crises crippling the country since 2019. To this end, the project's focus shifted from the initial objective of developing full-fledged strategic plans covering all sectors for the targeted UoMs to highlighting mainly strategic directions in some key sectors that can contribute to future local socioeconomic development.

### Expected outcomes

- Identification of strategic socioeconomic needs and directions for local communities, led by their respective selected UoMs, SDCs and stakeholders active at the local level, to provide a bottom-up evidence base about their socioeconomic status and development opportunities.<sup>1</sup>
- Dissemination of the produced evidence base to inform potential projects and secure further investment for their implementation by various internal and external stakeholders.

### Timeframe

The project was implemented from 2018 to 2023, during which it was put on hold multiple times during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent socioeconomic crisis.

### Geographical coverage

- Out of a total of 60 UoMs across all governorates of Lebanon that were invited to partake in the project, 38 responded and expressed initial interest in engaging in subsequent stages of the project to identify strategic directions for their future local socioeconomic development.
- Out of the 38 UoMs, 10 were eventually selected to identify strategic socioeconomic development directions, based on a number of criteria (See "Methodology" section below).

### Beneficiaries

- Local communities, including men, women, elderly, youth, children, and people with disabilities
- UoMs
- SDCs
- Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Local community

## Methodology

The aim of the series of booklets produced for the 10 targeted UoMs, which this booklet is a part of, is to analyse the local conditions of these unions and study the sectors and services that are essential components within them. These booklets provide a practical framework for taking future steps towards achieving sustainable and balanced development. Thus, the booklet series is the compilation of data and analysis about needs, gaps and challenges identified by the UoMs and other relevant local stakeholders, as well as recommendations that they have outlined to inform strategic socioeconomic development directions for their respective unions. Therefore, the booklets can serve as tools for decision-makers at both the local and national levels, as well as for development agencies to build upon when preparing their national and local programmes and policies. They were hence developed as part of the system-strengthening process of the

<sup>1</sup> As explained in the "Methodology" section below, the project did not aim to produce fully fledged socioeconomic action plans. The booklets developed to summarize the produced evidence base aim to lay the foundation for the future development of such detailed action plans by respective authorities or interested stakeholders.

project for UoMs to start the journey of enhancing their local socioeconomic development planning. The booklets do not intend to present full-fledged strategic socioeconomic action plans; rather they outline the foundational elements and entry points upon which it is hoped that relevant stakeholders can continue building upon to support in future local socioeconomic development action planning efforts.

In consultation with AICS and MoSA coordinators, it was agreed to have the assessment of the UoMs focusing especially on the main productive sectors in each UoM. Hence, each of the booklets includes a general description of the state of basic and social services – the latter focusing on health, education and culture/public spaces – within the respective UoM, in addition to some recommendations for improvement of these services. For the productive sectors, each booklet includes a more detailed analysis of the state of the two sectors that were identified as key for the future local socioeconomic development of the respective UoM, in addition to more detailed recommendations and a proposed road map, based on the data collected and analysed during the field activities and in consultation with local stakeholders.

The assessment and analysis on socioeconomic development issues conducted to develop this booklet series adopted a participatory approach that focused on actively involving local stakeholders in the respective UoMs. Thus, most of the figures presented in the booklets were derived or estimated through data collected and analysed participatively with and by local stakeholders in the UoMs. This bottom-up evidence production process endeavoured to impart local knowledge for the purpose of obtaining an initial baseline regarding certain socioeconomic development matters for the respective UoM. More in-depth assessments will need to be undertaken in the future to further detail and elaborate on the data collected and analysed for the purposes of this booklet series.

In line with this participatory approach, the methodology that was used to develop these booklets included the following components and steps:

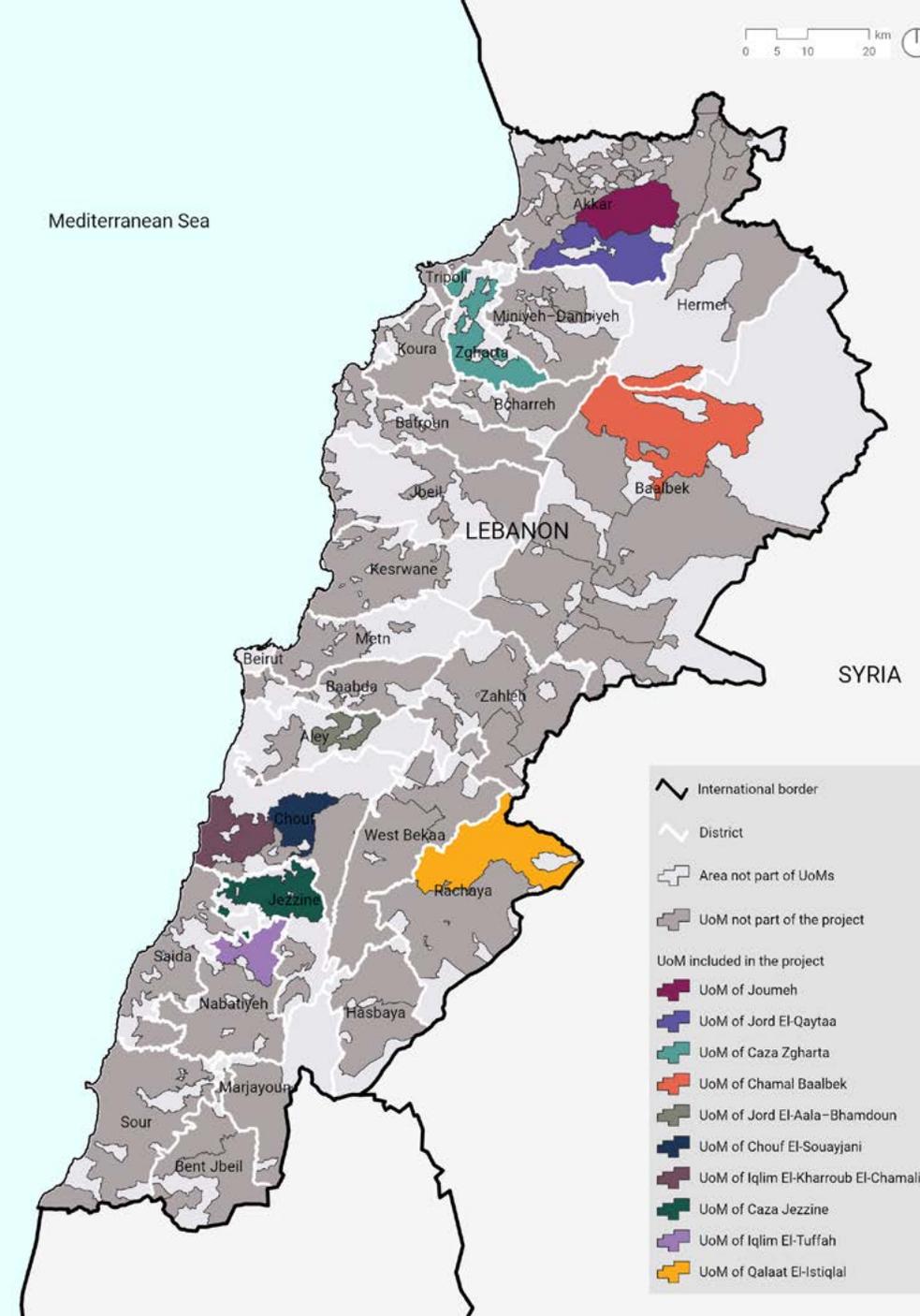
### Selection of UoMs

1. Representatives of all 60 UoMs in Lebanon were invited to an initial project introductory meeting. Out of the 60, representatives from 54 UoMs attended this meeting, which was held remotely through Microsoft Teams, as initial project mobilization took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Out of these 54 UoMs, 38 submitted “Expressions of Interest” to participate in the subsequent steps of the project. These expressions included the submission of general information about the UoMs and a mapping of existing strategic and/or action plans.
3. Out of the 38 UoMs, 21 were excluded because they had existing relevant plans and programmes supported by various international entities and donors. Out of the remaining 17 UoMs, 10 were eventually selected to develop booklets outlining strategic directions for their future local socioeconomic development, based on a number of criteria, including population density, high number of Syrian refugees, high levels of poverty, low value of annual municipal budgets, and limited or no previous financial support from donors.<sup>2</sup> Having UoMs represented from across all Lebanese governorates was also a criterion of selection. The 10 targeted UoMs include:

Akkar Governorate	North Governorate	Mount Lebanon Governorate	Bekaa Governorate	Baalbek–Hermel Governorate	South Governorate	Nabatiyeh Governorate
Joumeih	Caza Zgharta	Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun	Qalaat El-Istiqlal	Chamal Baalbek	Caza Jezzine	Iqlim El-Tuffah
Jord El-Qaytaa		Chouf El-Souayjani				
		Iqlim El-Kharroub El-Chamali				

**Table 1.** 10 UoMs selected under this project.

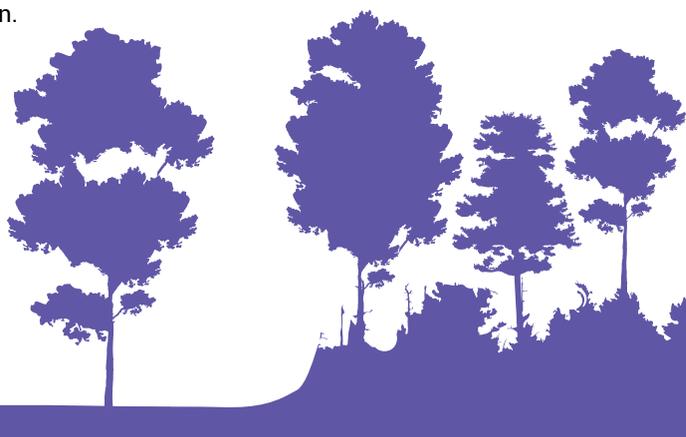
<sup>2</sup> This information was collected mainly through the information sheets that UoMs had previously submitted as part of the “Expression of Interest” phase explained above. Some information – mainly related to other financial support from donors – was also based on the knowledge of UN-Habitat area coordinators, as part of their regular work with UoMs.



**Figure 1.** Location of 10 UoMs selected under this project. Source: UN-Habitat (2023).

## Preparation and training

1. A project coordination team – consisting of 7 SDC coordinators designated by MoSA,<sup>3</sup> 11 representatives<sup>4</sup> from 10 UoMs, and 8 UN-Habitat staff members – was established to lead, implement and monitor project activities and progress (Figure 2).
2. Besides the project coordination team, 10 field teams were established for each of the 10 UoMs, consisting of 10–12 individuals representing municipalities, associations, organizations, cooperatives, clubs, and educational establishments active in their respective UoM (Figure 2). Their role was to assist in collecting information related to each municipality within their respective UoM, participate in extensive consultations, and in general guide and support field-based activities.
3. A detailed training curriculum on life and technical skills was developed by UN-Habitat to conduct workshops for the project coordination team at UoM level (representatives of participating UoMs/municipalities, SDCs and UN-Habitat). In addition, survey questionnaires and templates were developed in Arabic for data collection.
4. Based on the developed training curriculum, the following workshops were conducted between 2019 and 2023:
  - One workshop was conducted to develop the soft skills of the members of the project coordination team, including on communication techniques, community mobilization approaches, meeting moderation techniques, and public speaking techniques. This included the use of a broad range of communication tools, tips and guidelines.
  - One workshop was conducted to develop the planning capacity of the members of the project coordination team, in terms of developing and rolling out the participatory field assessments, including on constituting a representative field team, undertaking stakeholder mapping exercises, etc. Participants were trained on the use of tools and templates, including different diagrams, to outline the criteria for the creation of field teams, and their respective roles.
  - Four workshops were conducted to develop the capacity of the members of the project coordination team through regular coaching and training of trainers (ToT). Topics included the following: initiating and maintaining contacts with local community stakeholders, undertaking primary and secondary data collection, documenting key gathered information and data, and carrying out data analysis. During these workshops, multiple tools were developed together with the field teams, including, among others: a municipal survey questionnaire; field assessment checklists; forms to record field observations and remarks; protocols and guidance for conducting focus group discussions and key informant interviews; problem tree analysis tool; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, etc.
  - Ten workshops were conducted to develop the capacity of field teams to use templates and tools to help facilitate the local stakeholders in their respective UoM to set the UoM's vision, identify its strategic directions, and prepare road maps for prioritized strategic directions and sectors for the UoM to focus on.



<sup>3</sup> Representing each of the seven governorates covered by the project.

<sup>4</sup> All UoMs nominated one representative for the project, except for the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, which nominated two representatives as focal points at the request of the union's president.

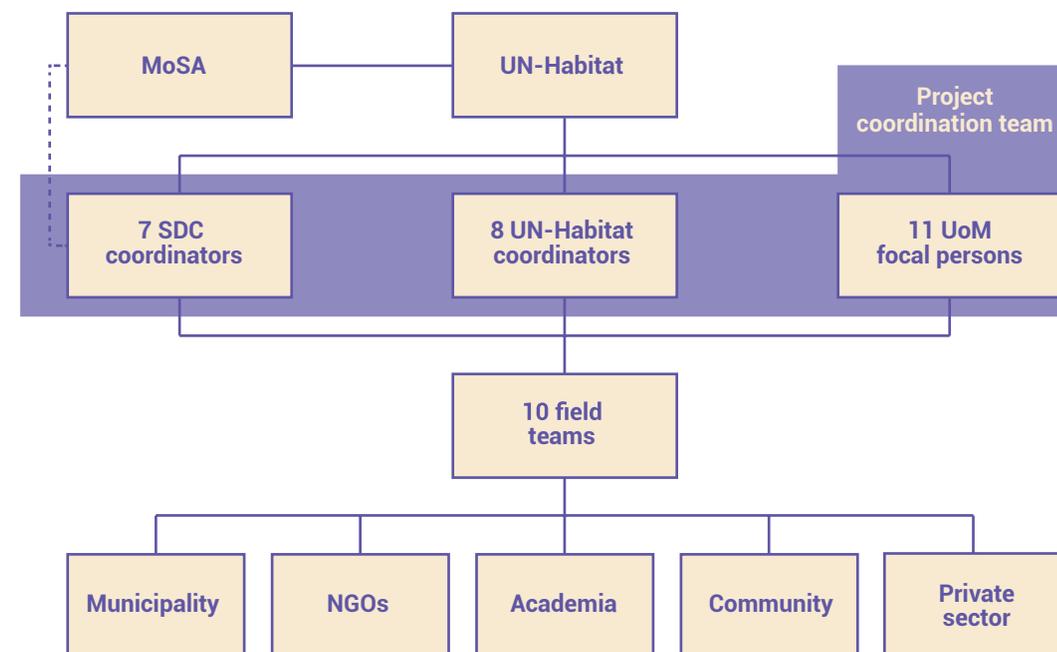


Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the development of booklets as part of the project.

## Data collection, analysis, and validation

1. Following the workshops, survey questionnaires were filled with each of the 142 municipalities that are part of the 10 targeted UoMs. The surveys aimed to gather general information about municipalities under the 10 UoMs (e.g. population, resources, projects).
2. After filling the surveys, the project coordination team conducted 52 focus group discussions, 61 consultative sessions, and 20 individual meetings with UoM presidents. The purpose of these activities was to collect additional data from different relevant stakeholders and to discuss the situation and challenges of different sectors in the UoMs.
3. Following data collection, the project coordination team met several times to analyse the general local context as well as the services and sectors of each UoM, using the participatory rapid appraisal methodology.<sup>5</sup> Strategic directions were thus formulated to support and enhance the socioeconomic status of each union. Additionally, strengths, weaknesses and available opportunities within all sectors were assessed. Depending on the existing resources and opportunities within each UoM, specific sectors were identified in each UoM, for which clear future directions were defined.
4. With regard to maps included in the booklets, the UN-Habitat Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team supported in the production of a set of general maps for each of the booklets to depict the context, topography and land cover/land use of each UoM. The GIS team also updated the boundaries of the UoMs based on their municipal composition. This was done based on available data from the survey with municipalities, open sources, and other relevant secondary data sources.

Based on the data collected and analysed, a booklet was produced for each of the 10 UoMs, including identified and proposed strategic directions and priority interventions. Thus, 10 UoMs successfully participated in the entire process, resulting in supporting and enhancing their capacities in setting strategic directions focused on socioeconomic needs, with a view to identify evidence-based entry points to enhance the socioeconomic conditions of mainly vulnerable areas affected by the multiple crises.

<sup>5</sup> Participatory rapid appraisal is a learning process that empowers people to conduct their own analysis to create the information base they need for participatory planning and action.





**Figure 5.** Satellite image of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.

Source: UN-Habitat (2023). The high-resolution satellite image displayed in this map was extracted from Esri online World Imagery.

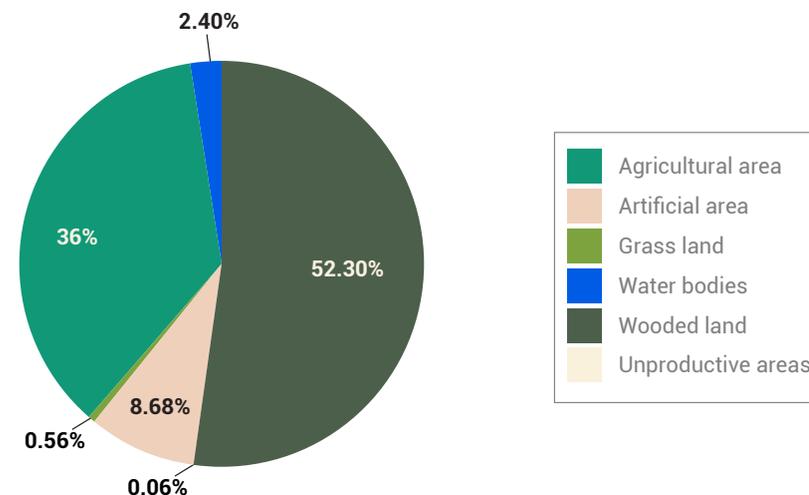
Jord El-Qaytaa is considered to be one of the most beautiful areas in Lebanon due to its breathtaking landscapes and distinctive biodiversity. Its forests are unique, its springs are pure, its flora is diverse, and its trees are rare. It also has a rich history and some important landmarks. It is a mountainous region with stunning landscapes that alternate between high mountains that seem to touch the sky, such as Jabal Arouba, and valleys like Wadi Jahannam, Mechmech Valley, and Wadi Nahr Moussa. The region is characterized by the presence of numerous castles and caves, such as the Salasel Castle and the Hammad and Moussa Caves, as well as the Kaf El-Saraya Castle and Kaf El-Hammam in Wadi Jahannam in Hrar. Additionally, there is the Nabaa Kaf Cave in the town of Houaich, which is similar to the Jeita Grotto, in Keserwan in terms of its geological formation.

The town of Fnaideq, one of the main towns in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, embraces beautiful natural landmarks in Akkar from its vast plains and fields of almond, mulberry, cedar, pine, and

fir trees to its spring called the Fnaideq Spring, where fresh and clean water flows from a deep cave. Its castles date back to the time of the French Mandate with traces of the French building in the Qammouaa Plain and the English Trail. The Azr Forest in Fnaideq is classified as one of the most beautiful forests in Lebanon and one of the rarest in the Middle East. As identified by members of the local committee, tourists from many regions and countries visit it to enjoy its captivating beauty and engage in hiking through the mountain trail that passes through several stations in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, from the Wadi Jahannam to the Azr Forest.

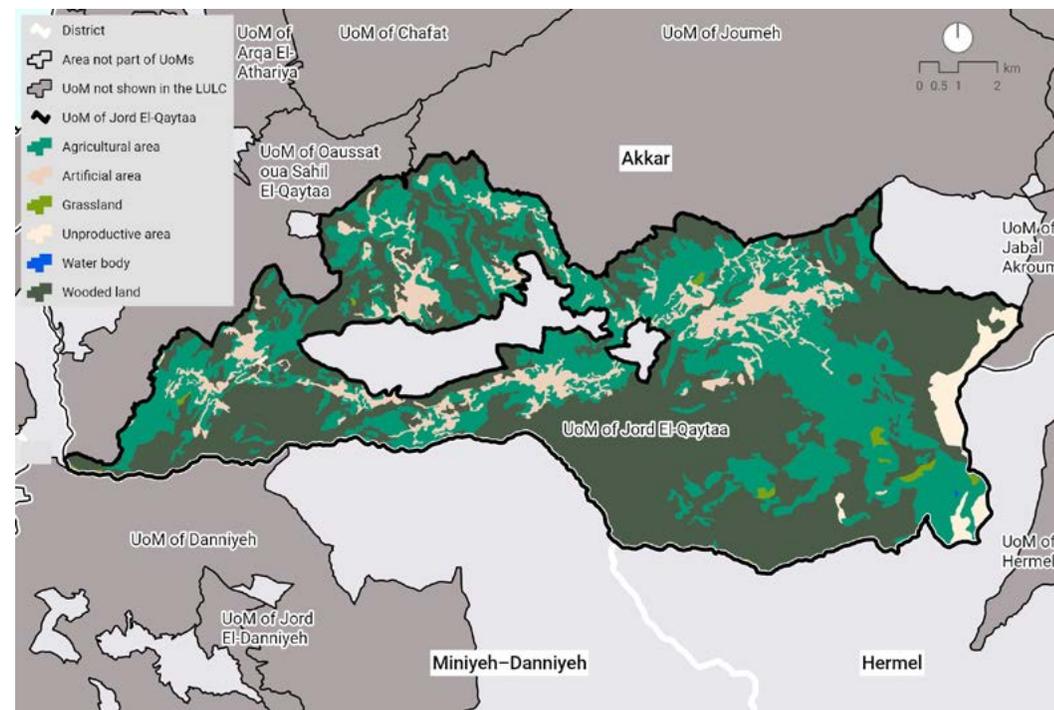
Wooded lands within the UoM cover 52.3 per cent (67.40 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total area and agricultural areas span 36 per cent (46.37 km<sup>2</sup>), while artificial areas account for 8.68 per cent (11.18 km<sup>2</sup>). Unproductive areas (unused plots) make up 2.4 per cent (3.09 km<sup>2</sup>), water bodies 0.06 per cent (0.07 km<sup>2</sup>), and grassland 0.56 per cent (0.74 km<sup>2</sup>) of the UoM's area (Figures 6 and 7).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The figures are based on the land cover/land use classification system level 1, calculated by the National Centre for Remote Sensing in the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon (CNRS-L) in 2017. According to



**Figure 6.** Land cover/land use as a percentage of the total area of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.

Source: Calculation made by UN-Habitat (2023) based on the Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Centre for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).



**Figure 7.** Land cover/land use within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.

Source: UN-Habitat (2023), adapted from Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Centre for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L (2017).

that classification, the category "artificial areas" includes urban areas (urban fabric), activity areas (industrial or commercial area, port area, airport), non-built-up areas (dumpsites, landfills, urban extension and/or construction site, urban vacant land), and artificial, non-agricultural vegetated areas (green urban area, and sports and leisure facilities). "Agricultural areas" include field crops, permanent crops, intensive agriculture, and agricultural units. "Wooded land" includes dense wooded land, clear wooded land, scrubland, and burned wooded land. "Grassland" includes both dense and clear grassland. "Unproductive areas" include bare rocks, bare soils, beaches, and dunes.

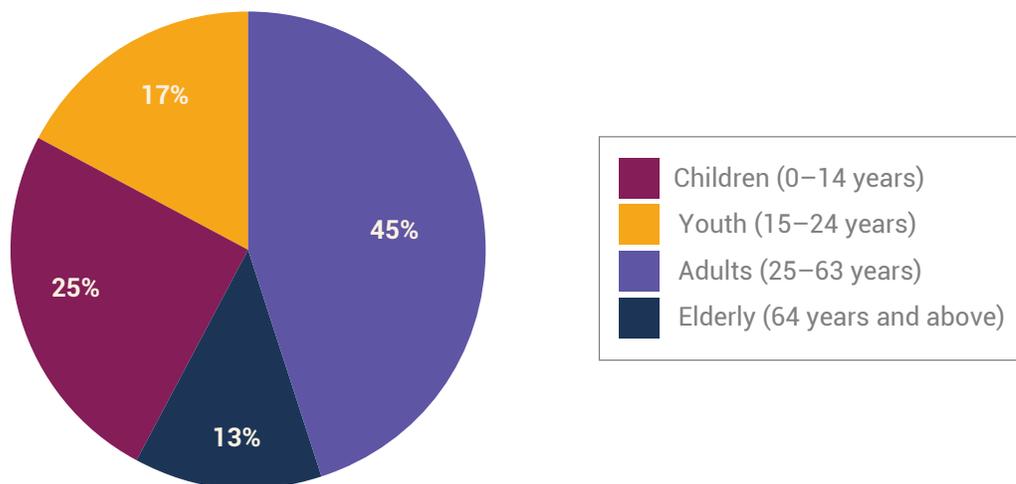
## Population overview

The total population within the municipalities of the union is approximately 131,000 people, with non-Lebanese residents (mostly Syrian refugees) making up about 4.5 per cent of this population, according to surveys conducted with the 13 municipalities of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.

The UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is characterized by its young population, with approximately 42 per cent of its total population belonging to the age groups of children and youth, according to the

surveys filled by the municipalities' mayors. The chart below illustrates the distribution of different age groups within the union (Figure 8).

There is a significant number of expatriates from the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa who are spread in various countries around the world, including in Australia, Canada, Germany, France, Denmark, and Gulf Arab countries. Most of these expatriates hail from such towns as Mechmech, Qoubaiyat, Ain El-Zahab, and Beit Younes.



**Figure 8.** Distribution of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa's population by age.  
Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.



## Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

The state of basic services in the municipalities of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is considered acceptable, as all services are available, although to varying degrees between sectors and municipalities. Like in the rest of Lebanon, the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa suffers from a deterioration in the quality and quantity of basic services due to the ongoing acute socioeconomic and financial crisis, affecting service provision and maintenance, due to the lack of ability of local authorities to cover operational and maintenance costs.

### Water

Water networks within the municipalities of the union are available and extend from water stations to all residential buildings. Their overall condition is considered to be good in terms of infrastructure age and the absence of maintenance work. These networks are operated by the municipalities and are supplied with water from springs and artesian wells. However, like many other areas of Lebanon, the municipalities within the union suffer from continuous water shortage. This issue is primarily due to prolonged power outages and rising fuel prices, which affect the operation of water pumps and distribution systems. This situation can lead to tensions and disputes between residents and municipalities, especially in towns where Syrian refugees reside side by side with Lebanese, where there is increased pressure on all basic infrastructure services.

In most municipalities, water used for drinking and daily use is contaminated due to the infiltration of wastewater into groundwater sources, posing significant public health concerns.

To address the water supply and quality challenges in the municipalities of the union, the stakeholders involved in this project recommended that it is essential to invest in renewable energy sources for reliable water distribution, establish a robust water quality monitoring system, and develop wastewater treatment facilities to prevent contamination.

### Roads and transportation

The condition of roads within the municipalities of the union is considered to be acceptable but varies between municipalities, ranging from good in some

areas to less satisfactory in others, according to mayors, the Halba SDC coordinator and other stakeholders who were consulted with as part of the project. Similar to other areas in Lebanon, roads in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa face challenges, such as the lack of nighttime lighting due to frequent power outages and a lack of maintenance. This situation leads to a lack of security, increasing the risk of thefts and trespassing, especially in densely populated towns like Fnaideq and Mechmech. In addition, most of the roads inside the municipalities have not been paved for the past 10 years.

Residents in the union rely on private cars and vehicles for their transportation needs, primarily because of the absence of public transportation options, as in other parts of the country. There are public buses for university students in some municipalities (Fnaideq, Mechmech, Hrar), managed by the municipalities. However, these buses are currently not operating at their full capacity for transporting students to their universities and are mainly used for transporting school students within their respective municipalities. This situation is due to the high fuel prices and the municipalities' inability to cover the expenses.

As for the main roads of the UoM in general, they are paved, but they lack traffic safety conditions and need maintenance to ensure road safety.

Therefore, local stakeholders engaged in this project considered it crucial to enhance the transportation infrastructure in the UoM. Their recommendations included prioritizing road maintenance, improving nighttime lighting during power outages, and enhancing public transportation to reduce reliance on private

vehicles, especially for university students. Stakeholders argued that these measures could collectively help address the UoM's main road infrastructure and transportation challenges, ensuring safer and more efficient transportation for residents.

## Buildings and facilities

The towns within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa share similarities in terms of the structure of the buildings. Most residential buildings in the UoM consist of three floors. Some towns are characterized by houses with mostly tiled roofs, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union. One of the major challenges is related to encroachments on public and common lands, as well as the presence of some residential buildings that do not adhere to building safety regulations, potentially endangering their occupants.

Non-residential buildings and facilities include industrial, commercial and official (municipalities, schools, etc.) buildings, as well as a few tourist-related establishments, such as restaurants and small hotels.

To help improve urban aesthetics, safety and community well-being, local stakeholders who participated in the project recommended that municipalities and the UoM should exert more efforts to enforce urban planning and zoning regulations, reclaim public spaces, ensure building safety through inspections, promote sustainable architecture, preserve buildings of cultural heritage, and support tourism-related facilities, while making sure to engage the local communities in decision-making.

## Electricity

Public electricity networks are available within the towns and villages of the union, and they are in a relatively acceptable condition. These networks are connected to all homes but are old and often require maintenance and upgrading, including cable replacement and an increase in the number of transformers. Residents rely on the public electricity supply provided by the Electricité du Liban (EDL), which is often subject to frequent and prolonged outages, as in the rest of the country. To cope with

these outages, residents often subscribe to private generators or adopt solar power systems if feasible. Public and private generator electricity bills are considered to be high for most residents relative to their low purchasing power. The shortage of transformers and encroachments on public networks, among others, lead to frequent breakdowns in the public electricity supply. These issues reflect the challenges faced by the electricity sector across Lebanon, including aging infrastructure and unreliable power supply.

Therefore, to empower municipalities to contribute to local economic and social development, local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it essential to enhance electricity supply, focusing on infrastructure upgrading, outage reduction, solar power promotion, and private generator regulation. These steps can help improve the reliability and affordability of the public electricity supply, and hence reduce reliance on private generators.

## Sanitation

According to a consultation session with relevant local stakeholders, the estimated percentage of residential buildings connected to sewage networks across the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is approximately 60 per cent. These networks are old and may require maintenance or upgrades. Approximately 40 per cent of residential buildings rely on septic tanks for sewage treatment, particularly in towns like Qoubaiyat and Ain El-Zahab.

The treatment method for wastewater typically involves direct disposal into water drains, streams and rivers, or collection from septic tanks and then discharge into water channels. However, this method can lead to several problems, including the creation of stagnant water bodies, groundwater pollution, the potential for diseases and epidemics, and foul odours.

These issues highlight the importance of improving sewage and stormwater management in the UoM to mitigate these environmental and health risks. A few key recommendations voiced by local stakeholders who participated in the project with regard to the sanitation situation

were to expand sewage networks, regulate septic tanks, establish treatment plants, enhance stormwater management, educate the public, enforce compliance, assess environmental impact, and collaborate with health and other relevant authorities to safeguard public health and the environment.

## Solid waste management

Solid waste collection and disposal are managed by each municipality within the union, utilizing available machinery and resources. Each municipality disposes of its waste in designated landfills within its geographical area. The union has not been able to reach an agreement with Al-Amanna Al Arabia, the private company that transports most of Akkar's waste to the Srar landfill in Srar village located in West Akkar, primarily due to the high cost that municipalities within the union cannot afford. Consequently, each municipality has taken it upon itself to address its waste management issues to the best of its financial, human and geographic capabilities, while waiting for a collective solution that includes all municipalities within the union. However, this poses a significant burden on municipalities due to their limited financial capabilities, preventing them from securing daily waste collection. This leads to waste accumulation in bins, proliferation of unauthorized dumps, and other haphazard disposal practices by residents and, in turn, contributes to the environmental degradation of towns, including air and soil pollution, especially as some municipalities resort to burning waste in their landfills. Besides environmental risks, this situation has negative health impacts.

There are two waste sorting plants within the union, located in the towns of Mechmech and Fnaideq. However, the latter is currently

inactive due to the municipality's inability to cover its operational expenses.

In coordination with the European Union (EU), the UoM is currently preparing a project called SWaM (Solid Waste Management in Jord El-Qaytaa), which is under study.

Local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it essential to develop a comprehensive waste management plan at the union level, which should encompass source separation and the closure of unregulated landfills. Close collaboration with the EU to expedite the implementation of the above-mentioned solid waste management project in the UoM was also highlighted as necessary.

## Telecommunications

The telephone network reaches all homes in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, but the quality of cellular and internet services is considered to be below average. This is primarily due to the absence of signal boosting stations to cover all neighbourhoods in the towns within the UoM. Additionally, there are delays in maintenance work when faults occur, and frequent power outages affect the functioning of communication towers and stations. These challenges collectively contribute to the subpar quality of mobile and internet services in the area, and the high costs of internet services.

To improve the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa's cellular and internet services, local stakeholders identified the need to prioritize signal-boosting stations, rapid maintenance, backup power, and infrastructure upgrades. However, municipalities and UoMs have no control on this sector, which is run by the central government through the Ministry of Telecommunications.

## Social services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

### Health care

Health-care services in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa are provided through Khalaf El-Habtoor Hospital in the town of Hrar and

several public and private health centres located in the towns of Fnaideq, Hrar, Mechmech, Ain El-Zahab, and Qoubaiyat,

based on data collected through the surveys filled by the municipalities of the union. These health-care facilities offer a range of medical services, including primary care, radiological imaging, laboratory tests, and some subsidized medications. In general, the quality and cost of the available services are considered good overall, compared to those provided by public and private health-care centres and hospitals in Akkar. However, most health-care facilities in the union are not fully equipped to meet all the health-care needs of the population. Khalaf El-Habtoor Hospital, for example, lacks facilities for kidney dialysis, chemotherapy, and some surgical procedures, and the cost of recovery and treatment there is high relative to the low-income level of most union residents.

Health centres in the UoM of Jord El Qaytaa also lack some essential chronic medication semi-free clinics (offering subsidized consultations and medications) receive support from international organizations, such as the International Medical Corps. Despite this support, these clinics still fall short of meeting all the health-care needs of residents.

Regarding the two SDCs affiliated with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Mechmech and Ain El-Zahab, their situation is dire. Health services are no longer available in these centres due to the ongoing economic crisis in the country.

Access to health-care centres is possible, but the cost of transportation is high for residents living in geographically distant towns of the union.

Thus, overall, the main issues in the health-care sector include a shortage of specialized medical staff and modern equipment, as well as high hospital, treatment, medication and transportation costs, especially for those with limited income.

In light of these difficult circumstances, local stakeholders in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa recommended that existing health-care centres in the union are supported and enhanced through the provision of specialized medical staff, necessary equipment, and a steady supply of both regular and chronic

medications. The establishment of specialized departments for heart diseases, kidney dialysis, and cancer treatment at El-Habtoor Hospital was also highlighted as necessary to meet the health-care needs of the population. Local stakeholders also identified the need to work on providing public transportation within and outside the union to make health-care services more accessible at a lower cost. Furthermore, the importance of activating facilities that can help alleviate the burden of health-care costs on the population was emphasized. It is also necessary to establish a quality management centre in healthcare institutions operating in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, with the requirement of providing the necessary support to the Lebanese Red Cross centre in Hrar, especially since it carries out significant health-related tasks in the area, given the exceptional financial challenges it is going through. Additionally, local stakeholders argued that there is a need to provide mental health programmes in the UoM by hiring psychologists in both public and private schools, as well as in hospitals and health-care centres.

## Education

The UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa includes 51 public and private schools, and vocational institutes, all of which continue functioning, serving both Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees, despite the significant challenges they face, due to the ongoing economic crisis. The cost of education has become prohibitively expensive for many, in terms of both commuting costs for teachers and students to and from the schools and the rising cost of stationery, educational supplies, and fuel, which school administrations have been unable to bear from their budgets due to the deepening economic situation and the depreciation of the Lebanese Pound. Other challenges include continuous school closures due to strikes by teachers, the absence of internet service in schools hindering remote learning modalities, the emergence of signs of a new wave of school dropouts at all educational levels, the lack of laboratories in vocational institutes and schools, a shortage of specialized teachers, poor distribution of teachers among schools, and subpar school infrastructure.

According to a consultation with relevant education sectors stakeholders, the quality of educational services offered by public and private schools, as well as vocational institutes, is generally considered good. The UoM does not have any universities, which compels many students from the union to attend higher education institutions outside their town, especially in Tripoli, Halba and Koura. This increases their financial burdens.

According to local stakeholders engaged in the project, it is crucial to work on supporting the public schools through building maintenance, the provision of necessary equipment, and improvements in remote learning conditions. Fair teacher distribution among schools and the activation of parental councils as active partners in the educational process were also emphasized. In addition, it was suggested to provide subsidized transportation for students to schools and universities. Another recommendation included supporting vocational institutes to add new specializations that cater to the needs of the local job market. It was also argued that these institutes should become equipped with laboratories and should help establish links between graduates and the job market. In addition, it was recommended to establish a business incubator in the UoM that guides students towards suitable specializations, supporting them linguistically and logistically.

Given the increasing challenges faced by the central government and its institutions, local stakeholders emphasized the important role of municipalities and the UoM to address issues on the ground, including related to the education sector. Specifically, they argued that these local government institutions must play a fundamental role in:

- Monitoring and supervising public schools and liaising with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to address certain educational issues that can be resolved.
- Actively engaging in the activation of parental councils by encouraging local community members to participate in these councils, to bridge communication gaps between parents and school administrators, fostering an environment of collaboration and engagement. Through organizing events, fundraising, and collaborating on educational initiatives, they contribute to the overall development of the

schools and enhance parent involvement in their children's education.

- Communicating, networking and establishing partnerships with international organizations to provide public buses for the transportation of students, especially those at the university level.
- Considering activating the existing buses in Mechmech, Fnaideq and Hrar.
- Coordinating with expatriates from the UoM residing abroad to secure fuel subsidies for these buses.

## Culture and public spaces

On the cultural front, the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa has witnessed a noticeable decline in the organization of cultural seminars, lectures, and entertainment activities for all social groups. This decline is primarily due to the ongoing economic crisis, which hinders the continuation of such activities mainly because of the high costs associated with transportation and the necessary materials for such events.

The UoM lacks public parks and safe spaces that would provide areas for relaxation, entertainment, walking, and sports for people of all age groups. There is only one public park in Mechmech.

Like in many other Lebanese towns and cities, there are violations and encroachments related to unplanned construction in certain public areas in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, especially in markets and squares. These encroachments contribute to traffic congestion and a lack of green spaces between buildings.

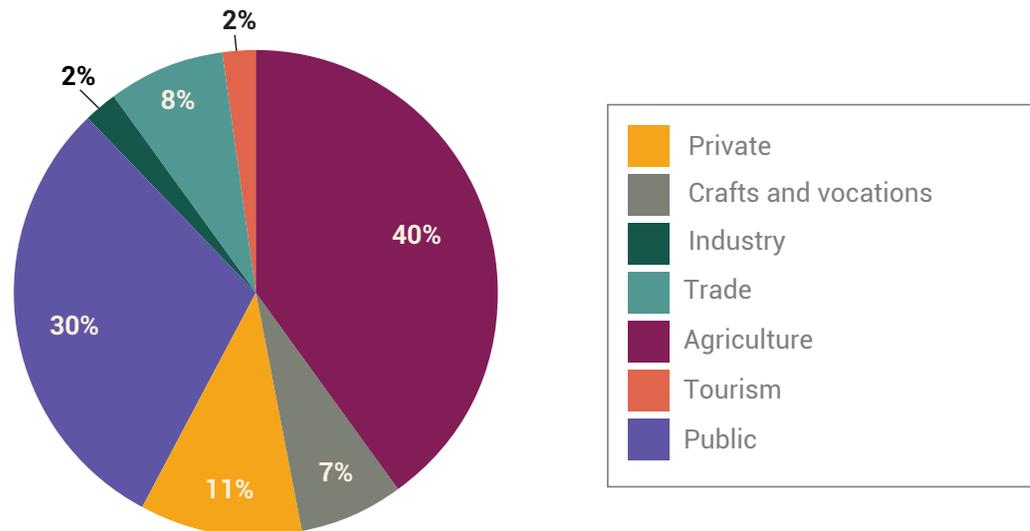
Therefore, local stakeholders emphasized the need to work on providing safe spaces in the union. This responsibility should be shouldered by the municipalities of the union with the aim of mitigating the severity of the ongoing crises in the country and their psychological and moral repercussions on local communities. Additionally, it was recommended that efforts need to be undertaken to support and empower local associations and clubs operating in the union in collaboration with municipalities, diaspora, and the private sector. This will help

them to finance and implement local cultural and social initiatives. They argued that this will help motivate young people to engage in community

affairs and reduce their inclination towards deviant behaviours.

## Local economy and livelihoods: Current state

This section provides an overview of the key local economy and livelihood challenges and needs in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, with a particular focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors, which have been identified through fieldwork and the outcomes of meetings and discussions with relevant parties to provide real opportunities to drive the process of socioeconomic development forward in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa. Recommendations to improve these two sectors will be presented separately in the next section.



**Figure 9.** Distribution of employment by sector in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.

Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

### Public sector

Approximately 30 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is employed in the public sector (Figure 9). The age of these employees ranges from 25 to 64 years old. In terms of gender distribution, 75 per cent of public sector employees are males and 25 per cent of them females, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union.

As for the fields of work within the public sector that union residents are involved in, they encompass a wide range of institutions and sectors, including the military, internal security forces, general security, public schools, municipalities, civil defence, health-care centres, ministries, and more. These institutions are located within or outside the municipalities of the union; in the latter case, employees need

to incur an additional financial burden related to transportation to and from their job locations.

### Private sector

The private sector represents approximately 11 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9). It includes employment in private schools, companies, pharmacies, private hospitals and health-care centres, and other institutions located within or outside the union. In terms of gender distribution, around 60 per cent of employees in the private sector are male and around 40 per cent are female, according to data collected through the survey with the municipalities of the union.

## Crafts and vocations

The percentage of workers in different crafts and vocations is estimated to be around 7 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the union (Figure 9). Males represent the majority, making up around 65 per cent of the workforce, and are engaged in various activities, such as construction-related work (painting, tiling, electrics, plumbing) as well as in crafts and industries like carpentry, blacksmithing, confectionery production, machinery, and automotive repair. The remaining 35 per cent are reportedly females, who are primarily involved in home-based food manufacturing, sewing, hairdressing, and women's grooming.

## Agriculture

Agriculture serves as a primary source of income for many households in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, where approximately 40 per cent of the total workforce is employed in this sector, the majority (85 per cent) of whom are males, according to information from the union president and the survey filled out by the municipalities. Agricultural lands cover an estimated area of about 46.37 km<sup>2</sup>, which comprises approximately 36 per cent of the union's total area (Figures 6 and 7).

The key agricultural products in the UoM include apples, olives and pomegranates.

There are two agricultural cooperatives responsible for agricultural affairs and farmer support. However, the agriculture sector faces multiple challenges, including water scarcity for irrigation, the drying up of some springs, lack of adequate agricultural guidance, reduced productivity, reliance on traditional irrigation methods, difficulties in marketing and selling products, production stagnation, rising costs of fertilizers and pesticides, high energy costs, lack of agricultural guidance, pollution and other climate change issues, high production costs, and conventional farming practices.

## Industry

The percentage of individuals employed in the industry sector within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is very limited, accounting for only 2 per cent of the total workforce, according to survey

conducted with the municipalities involved in this project. The union does not host large-scale factories or manufacturing facilities. The primary industries include carpentry, blacksmithing, construction materials production, and confectionery manufacturing. Most of the produced goods are consumed within the municipalities of the union, with the remaining exported to surrounding areas.

## Trade

Commercial establishments are present in most municipalities of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, with the majority being small in size. These establishments include businesses related to shops selling food items, clothing shops, supermarkets, furniture galleries, butcheries, and gas stations. Online commerce is also part of this sector. Approximately 8 per cent of the workforce is estimated to be employed in this sector according to the survey conducted with municipalities within the UoM.

The challenges faced by the commerce sector resemble those in the industry sector, including frequent power outages affecting operations, a lack of expertise, weak marketing efforts, high transportation costs, and a decline in the purchasing power of most residents.

## Tourism

The UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa boasts vast green and forest areas, stunning landscapes, unique woodlands, natural springs, caves, rivers, mountains, plains, and other natural landmarks. Despite these natural attractions, the tourism sector in the union is still relatively weak in terms of income generated from tourism activities and the local workforce's involvement. The percentage of employees in this sector is estimated at 2 per cent of the total workforce (Figure 9).

One of the significant threats to the natural and forest resources in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is the deliberate setting of fires to obtain firewood and produce charcoal. This practice not only harms the environment but can also lead to the destruction of valuable forested areas. Additionally, road construction aimed at providing easier access to private lands can

lead to deforestation, and encroachment on unregistered lands poses a further threat.

Tourism facilities are primarily found in the tourist centre of Fnaideq, which was established in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, the Hope Generation Association in the town of Fnaideq, and the Municipal Tourism Committee. This centre, founded in 2022, is staffed by 10 volunteers responsible for providing guidance and tourist training. Fnaideq also has a trained team of young men and women from the town who work as tourist guides under the municipality's supervision. Additionally, there are 100 wooden guesthouses in Fnaideq and a very limited number in Hrar. Restaurants and snack bars can be found in Hrar, Fnaideq, Qoubaiyat, and Mechmech.

Municipal leaders and other relevant stakeholders within the municipalities of the union attribute the shortcomings in the tourism sector to the lack of an informational and marketing plan for the union, both at the local and national levels. They also highlight a lack of experience and cultural understanding of tourism among those working in the sector, insufficient official tourist institutions, and high transportation costs.

Regarding the tourism sector, it is evident that the industry is underdeveloped in the region. It is limited to the presence of some restaurants in Hrar and Qoubaiyat, as well as in Fnaideq, and a few guesthouses in Fnaideq and Hrar. The tourism sector lacks the necessary infrastructure in terms of advertising, promotion, and tourism planning. There is also a need for individuals who can initiate and manage tourism projects, but they lack the skills, resources, and conditions required to establish such facilities and enterprises.

Additionally, there is a fundamental need for tour guides and mountain guides who can provide information about the natural landscape, forestation, and the union's various natural resources. The existing institutions in the union lack initiative, and Akkar as a whole is largely absent from the national tourism map. Several factors contribute to this, including poor infrastructure, geographic remoteness from cities, transportation barriers that hinder access to the area, and a lack of networks and resources subject to healthy food production conditions.

Moreover, issues like production quality, product testing, inadequate sanitation infrastructure, substandard water disposal mechanisms, and a lack of organized tourist locations and facilities with proper management and qualified personnel further hinder the development of the tourism sector in the union. All of these factors collectively present significant challenges to the growth of the tourism industry. Efforts should be directed towards addressing these issues to tap into the tourism potential of the region and boost its economic prospects.

There are several environmental challenges in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa that threaten its natural resources and the overall environment. Some of these issues include:

**Human interventions:** Unregulated human activities that harm the environment, such as unauthorized tree cutting and deforestation, pose a significant threat. Unplanned grazing and land use can lead to the degradation of forested areas and natural habitats.

**Protected areas:** The establishment of protected areas is vital for conserving and protecting the natural environment. These areas not only provide a suitable environment for beekeeping and honey production but also play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity.

**Uncontrolled construction:** Chaotic and unregulated construction in the Qammouaa region, without proper sanitation infrastructure, poses a significant problem. Improper sewage disposal can lead to groundwater contamination and environmental pollution.

Despite the challenging tourism landscape, there are some promising tourism initiatives led by residents and local associations within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa. A few notable examples include the following:

One such initiative is the municipal initiative in Fnaideq to establish an agricultural nursery in the Azr Forest, containing 2000 Carob trees and 2500 Azr trees. The goal is to cultivate the barren lands and preserve the sustainability of these trees that characterize the region. It's worth noting that this nursery was funded by the Afforestation Association and the Swedish Salar Association. Fnaideq municipality aims to establish twinning with the Afforestation

Association to sell trees from the nursery in support of the Azr Forest.

There are also two wooden rooms in the forest containing wooden products used for display and tourism promotion. There are individual and collective walking initiatives, as well as the environmental role played by the Akkar Path Association in the rapid intervention to extinguish fires and the establishment of guesthouses in Fnaideq and Harar. However, it should be noted here that the haphazard construction and human activities in the Qammouaa are due to the lack of official land surveys and classification by the municipality, making it an unregulated land subject to indiscriminate use without accountability.

The Darb Akkar Association plays a vital role in rapid firefighting response and the promotion of environmental tourism.

## Remittances from abroad

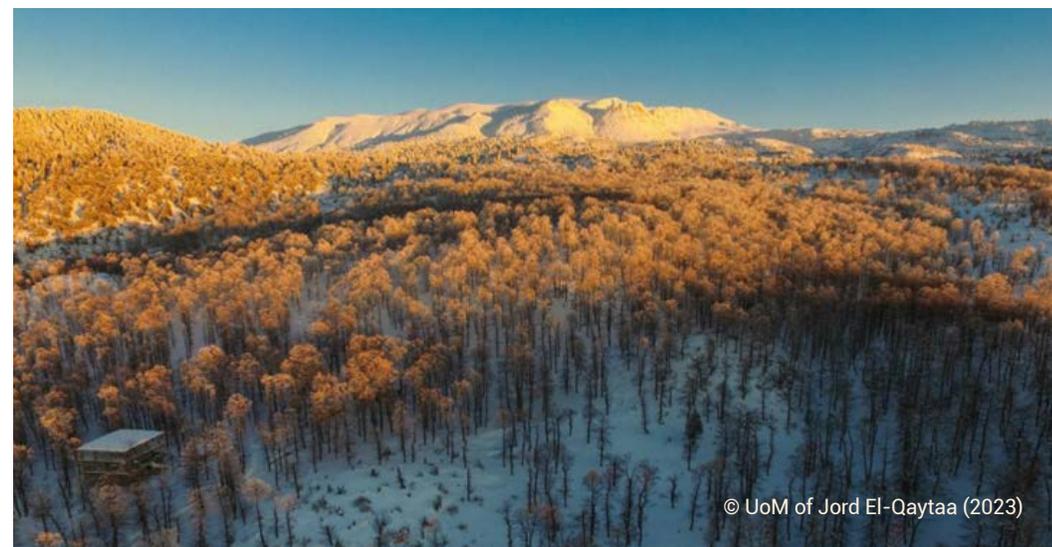
According to the survey with the municipalities, around 7 per cent of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa's registered population have emigrated over the years. Emigration from the UoM began mostly at the onset of the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) and increased over the years due to ongoing crises. In response to these crises, early emigrants took steps to reunite with their children, families and relatives, on the one hand, and sought to marry relatives in the homeland to help them emigrate too, on the other hand.

This contributed to a significant increase in the number of emigrant relatives, especially to Australia. The towns of Mechmech, Ain El-Zahab, and Beit Younes are among the richest in terms of the number of their emigrant descendants in Australia, numbering more than 10,000 expatriates.

The emigration rate accelerated significantly after 2019 due to the security situation, the economic crisis, and the absence of job opportunities.

Not all emigrants from the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa come from affluent backgrounds; some are well-off, primarily early emigrants, while others have a moderate financial status, sufficient to support their families and relatives.

Emigrants support their families, relatives and hometowns through regular remittances as identified by the local stakeholders. Many emigrants also respond to support when called upon to assist by municipalities or local notables who contribute significantly to local decisions. For example, emigrants from Mechmech, Qoubaiyat, and Ain El-Zahab have supported their towns in securing fuel; purchasing land for a cemetery; setting up water reservoirs in Mechmech; providing aid to cover medical expenses; buying medication; supporting the needy of the communities especially during Ramadan; and establishing four tourist rooms in Qammouaa, Fnaideq.



## Recommendations for sectors identified as key for future local socioeconomic development

Based on the consultative meetings and workshops held with representatives of the municipalities within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, there was consensus on adopting the following vision for local socioeconomic development:

**“ Jord El-Qaytaa: a green area with rich human, natural and economic a, with strong institutions that actively engage with local communities and care for their well-being. ”**

To achieve this vision, it was recommended that municipalities, civil society, and the private sector must come together, along with local communities, working collaboratively to foster local socioeconomic development based on the UoM's assets and available opportunities. According to the results of the process followed during the project within the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, it was suggested that there should be a focus on developing the agriculture and tourism sectors due to the available human, natural and material resources that can be built upon and enhanced. It was recommended that sectors like industry, trade, and social and basic services should complement the agriculture and tourism sectors.

Working towards achieving agricultural and tourism development necessitates creating a road map for each sector (see the subsections

“Proposed Agriculture Sector Road Map” and “Proposed Tourism Sector Road Map” below) that includes multiple stages to be implemented within a logical timeframe and according to the availability of funding. The road map for both the agriculture and tourism sectors was envisioned to encompass strategic interventions linked to four key factors or aspects:

1. Infrastructure
2. Existing institutional framework
3. Natural resources
4. Local human resources

By addressing these factors strategically, it was argued that the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa can work towards realizing its vision and creating a thriving, cooperative and sustainable region that benefits its residents and contributes to the neighbouring communities and local economy.



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## Agriculture

Local stakeholders engaged in this project have identified key areas for development and enhancement for the Union of Municipalities of Jord El-Qaytaa.

Firstly, recognizing the pressing need to develop the skills of farmers. They also argued that efforts should be directed towards providing technical and vocational training for unemployed youth to create employment opportunities for them and prevent them from potentially engaging in deviant behaviours in the region.

Moreover, local stakeholders argued that it is crucial to pay attention to animal husbandry by activating veterinary medicine and providing training to farmers on how to administer appropriate medications and conduct regular check-ups for their livestock. Additionally, the importance of fostering beekeeping and conducting inspections of honey quality before putting it on the market was emphasized.

In addition to these efforts, there is an imperative to introduce new crops suitable for climate change, such as pistachios, chestnuts, kiwi, and mango. Utilizing existing agricultural opportunities, including the Agricultural Research Centre in Abdeh, the Agricultural Technical School, and programmes from donor organizations and relevant government institutions, is crucial for sustainable development.

To address the challenges faced by farmers, the establishment of public cold storage facilities

is recommended, replacing the existing private ones that impose additional financial burdens on farmers in Fnaideq and Mechmech.

Creating markets for the sale of agricultural products, establishing agricultural observatories, and supporting small-scale farmers with affordable loans are also essential components of the proposed development plan.

Furthermore, local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it imperative to work on the establishment of a modern irrigation system to replace the traditional one and to protect groundwater resources. This would include safeguarding the Qammouaa Basin and its surrounding areas from encroachments, as this basin serves as a primary water source for the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa and other adjacent Akkar regions.

Lastly, to promote sustainable land use, local stakeholders recommend land reclamation, land surveying, and classification by municipalities. This will help prevent encroachments and unregulated urban sprawl. The activation of agricultural cooperatives and the development of the cottage industry, such as local cheese production, should also be promoted to enhance the overall economic landscape of Jord El-Qaytaa.



# Proposed agriculture sector road map

Level of difficulty to implement	Budget to implement
High	High
Moderate	Moderate
Low	Low

Short time to achieve

- Activating coordination and collaboration between relevant ministries and municipalities
- Establishing an agricultural committee within the UoM to engage with stakeholders

Medium time to achieve

Relying on solar energy as a source to power irrigation wells

Enhancing the work of agricultural cooperatives and activating their role

Developing rainfed and irrigated crops and introducing new varieties suitable for climate change

Training farmers in modern farming practices and techniques

Collaborating with ministries and municipalities to establish a sustainable plan for infrastructure maintenance

Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and enhancing collaboration

Guiding youth to reduce migration

Providing clean water for irrigation

Collaborating with civil defence and other relevant authorities to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for fire prevention and control

Activating the relationship with expatriates and involving them in financing and marketing projects

Constructing and maintaining agricultural roads

Collaborate more actively with local development-oriented civil society associations

Preserving natural resources and investing in them

Training residents in the food processing and cottage industry

Treating sewage water and using it for irrigation of specific crops

Establishing connections with agricultural colleges within universities to facilitate agricultural research initiatives

Protecting groundwater from pollution

Preparing and implementing recurring awareness campaigns to encourage residents to engage in agricultural activities

Establishing modern irrigation systems for agriculture

Supporting small-scale farmers through accessible loan programmes

Developing rainfed and irrigated crops and introducing new varieties suitable for climate change

Developing and implementing advertising and media campaigns to highlight the importance of agricultural products in the union

Establishing reservoirs for rainwater and snow accumulation

Preserving soil by establishing proper waste landfills

Encouraging youth to participate in agricultural cooperatives and enter the job market

Establishing fruit cooling facilities under agricultural cooperatives

Working on establishing specialized agricultural and livestock cooperatives

Creating reserves to preserve natural resources

Integrating the use of modern technology in agriculture

Establishing relationships with donor organizations to secure funding and resources for the implementation of projects

Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas

Long time to achieve

Striving to establish centres for agricultural training and guidance

Improving agricultural marketing by providing targeted training in packaging and labeling techniques, as well as exploring opportunities to access new markets outside the union

## Infrastructure

## Institutional framework

## Natural resources

## Human resources

## Tourism

The above-described current state of the tourism sector in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa characterized by unfavourable circumstances calls for serious efforts in restructuring and rebuilding touristic institutions, as well as equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to be able to perform according to quality standards required for tourism services.

One recommendation made by local stakeholders engaged in the project entailed investments in training and capacity-building for those involved in the tourism sector, including tour guides, hospitality staff, and other relevant professionals. Additionally, maintaining and improving the union's infrastructure (such as roads, sanitation facilities, and public transportation) was considered critical to provide a better experience for tourists and attract more visitors.

Local stakeholders also emphasized the importance of protecting the natural resources of the union. They argued that collaboration between various stakeholders, including local communities, governmental bodies, and NGOs, is vital in addressing environmental challenges and preserving the natural heritage of the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa. More specifically, to combat wildfires effectively, they recommended the empowerment of rapid-response firefighting units, which can act swiftly to extinguish fires before they spread further. The First Responder Team already formed by the union, plays a crucial role in containing and preventing the expansion of wildfires. According to local stakeholders, the Akkar Environmental Path Association also works effectively to mitigate wildfires and takes a leading role in promoting environmental tourism.

Addressing these environmental challenges requires the implementation of comprehensive policies, regulations, and community engagement. Local stakeholders involved in the project recommended that efforts should focus on sustainable land-use practices, conservation of forests and natural habitats, and the establishment of protected areas. Additionally, proper urban planning and

infrastructure development are necessary to ensure that construction activities do not harm the environment or public health.

Moreover, local stakeholders argued that it is important to resolve property disputes and armed conflicts (such as that between Akkar El-Atiqa and Fnaideq), because these tensions can discourage tourists from visiting the mountains of union.

Local stakeholders also argued that transforming the Qammouaa region into a natural reserve is essential for safeguarding the valuable forest resources within it and protecting the primary water source for Akkar Governorate. This would not only conserve the union's natural resources but also enhance its attractiveness for ecotourism. It was also recommended that a proper land survey and classification by the municipality is needed in the Qammouaa region to prevent unplanned construction and unregulated human interventions. The tourism sector in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa is considered one of the most important economic sectors with great potential for investment. Activating the roles of municipalities and the private sector, as well as effectively engaging with expatriates to encourage investments, were considered of great importance to shed light on the tourism sector in the UoM.

Local stakeholders emphasized the need to focus on the close interlinkages between the tourism and agriculture sectors. Agriculture can play a significant role in boosting the tourism sector, as tourism often relies on the use of fresh produce in local restaurants.

To achieve the vision of transforming the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa into a destination for both domestic and international tourists, a concerted effort and ongoing commitment are required. Drawing from experiences in other regions of Lebanon where successful tourism initiatives have been implemented is crucial. By adapting and applying these experiences to the local context, the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa can benefit from best practices and insights to develop its tourism and agriculture sectors.

Coordination and collaboration between the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa, the UoM of Joumeh, and potentially other neighbouring unions are essential. Working together, these unions can create joint tourism plans that consider the unique characteristics and culture of each area, allowing for better utilization of their natural and human resources.

One specific initiative that could significantly contribute to the promotion of tourism in the UoMs of Jord El-Qaytaa, Joumeh, and Al-Dreib region is the activation of the Akkar Highlands National Park. Establishing a national natural reserve within this park might make it the largest and most beautiful in Lebanon. This national reserve could become a focal point for ecotourism and nature lovers, attracting visitors from both within Lebanon and abroad.

The local stakeholders involved in the project have outlined specific steps to achieve the vision, including activating the National Park in the High Mountains of Akkar, enhancing and expanding the union's tourism infrastructure, and developing a strategic tourism plan in

collaboration with the Tourist Guidance Centre in Qammouaa, as well as local associations and municipalities.

Other steps include reactivating the existing tourist centre in Qammouaa, Fnaideq, fostering coordination and cooperation among touristic and environmental associations, promoting and advertising the union's tourist attractions, and providing training for local communities to ensure high-quality touristic services.

Moreover, training local guides on tourism and mountain expeditions, activating a first response team to swiftly respond to wildfire incidents, improving the quality of services in guesthouses, encouraging more investment in this sector, and organizing annual touristic festivals are crucial components of the comprehensive strategy outlined by the stakeholders.

Strengthening connections with expatriates and encouraging them to invest in the tourism sector is highlighted as a vital step towards the sustainable development of tourism in the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa.



# Proposed tourism sector road map

Level of difficulty to implement	Budget to implement
High	High
Moderate	Moderate
Low	Low

Short time to achieve

- Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Tourism and enhancing cooperation
- Establishing a local committee within the UoM to communicate with stakeholders

- Activating the role of first responders for rapid intervention when wildfires break out

Medium time to achieve

- Maintaining roads leading to landmarks and tourist areas
- Relying on solar energy as a source to provide energy for tourist areas and facilities
- Providing permanent lighting during the night within tourist areas and landmarks

- Enhancing collaboration between municipalities and the private sector
- Pursuing the preparation of a tourism plan for the union
- Developing a tourism plan for Jord El-Qaytaa UoM in coordination with the existing Agricultural Guidance Centre in the Qammouaa region

- Activating the national park in the high mountains of Akkar and investing in it

- Training and empowering youth to provide tourism services
- Training residents in food processing and traditional food production
- Preparing and executing promotional and informational campaigns about the touristic sites and activities in the union
- Organizing regular tourist festivals
- Preparing and implementing recurrent awareness campaigns to encourage locals to engage in the tourism development process
- Creating walking trails for recreational hiking

Long time to achieve

- Providing basic services in the union (clean water, electricity, roads, sanitation, solid waste collection, etc.)
- Striving to establish a fixed transportation link from major cities to the UoM of Jord El-Qaytaa to enhance tourism
- Securing human resources for the protection and preservation of tourist and archaeological sites

- Building relationships with existing universities to support tourism guidance for university students
- Activating municipal and official accountability to prevent encroachments on tourist landmarks, forests, woodlands, springs, rivers, etc.
- Building relationships with donor organizations to facilitate project implementation
- Working on increasing and incentivizing investments in tourism projects

- Protecting and maintaining the rivers and springs in the union
- Limiting urban sprawl at the expense of areas of important ecological value
- Preserving and protecting the existing archaeological and heritage landmarks in the union
- Establishing reserves to conserve natural resources and attract visitors and tourists
- Developing and implementing municipal regulations to preserve natural resources and areas

- Encouraging families to establish guesthouses and rooms to enhance local tourism
- Activating relations with expatriates and encouraging them to invest in tourism projects

## Infrastructure

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## Conclusion

The developed road maps in the 10 booklets clearly show that advancing local socio-economic development in the 10 unions be it in the agriculture, industry, or tourism sectors is indeed a complex and lengthy process, yet not impossible. This path requires collective and proper local strategic visioning coupled with clear commitment by all stakeholders and serious efforts at different levels, in addition to significant financial resources and solid coordination local structures and mechanisms.

It is also evident from the roadmaps that UoMs, with the contribution from municipalities enrolled, could initiate primary steps that do not require significant funding but still support and contribute to the implementation of the overall vision on the long run.

It should also be clear to the unions and to the other local actors that the implementation of the roadmaps requires collective efforts from all. This includes local communities, municipalities, UoMs, SDCs, civil society organizations, and the private sector. To facilitate this collaboration, it's proposed to create a local advisory body (committee) for each identified sector. It is advised that the committee to be established by the UoM and include representatives of local public and private entities and institutions. The main role of these committees will be to lead and develop practical action plans to commence the implementation of the road map for each respective sector. Members of these committees must commit to providing the time and efforts necessary to achieve progress at the level of each sector.

The next step would entail that each committee individually contacts concerned ministries under each sector to learn more about the ministries' strategies and plans and their financial and human capacity to support and guide the union in the process of tourism, industry, and/or agricultural development, especially with regard to developing local strategies for the three sectors.

Based on outcomes of the meetings with relevant ministries, the designated committees would make the necessary contacts with relevant universities and donors to seek the potential financial and technical support aiming to developing a strategy and an executive plan for each sector.

Realistically speaking and with the commitment of local actors, the above-mentioned tasks from the creation of local committees to establishing partnerships to identifying entities supporting the development of the sector strategy, should not exceed a period of six months. The strategy to be prepared for each sector is expected to propose a detailed doable business plan with a reasonable timeline and a clear budget.