



**Executive Board of the  
United Nations Development  
Programme, the United Nations  
Population Fund and the United  
Nations Office for Project Services**

Distr.: General  
19 December 2025

Original: English

**First regular session 2026**

2 to 5 February 2026, New York

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Field visits**

**Report of the field visit of the Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and  
UNOPS to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan from 19 to 23 October 2025**

**I. Introduction**

1. The field visit to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan took place from 19 to 23 October 2025. Its objective was to enable Members of the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS to:

- observe the progress of key United Nations-supported initiatives;
- identify development challenges; and
- explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration, including within the context of UN80.

2. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Jordan brings together 29 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, including 19 with an in-country presence and 10 operating from headquarters or regional offices. In addition, eight entities maintain regional offices in Jordan. The office of the Special Envoy for Yemen and the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are also based in Amman. Collectively, the United Nations system in Jordan comprises approximately 10,000 personnel (about 7,500 with UNRWA and 2,500 across other entities).

3. During the visit, the delegation met with ministers and senior government officials, representatives of the United Nations system and local partners. It also visited a range of United Nations-supported projects across key sectors, including education, health, marine conservation, food security, youth engagement and inclusive green growth.

4. The visit underscored the critical role of the United Nations agencies in supporting a middle-income country such as Jordan, which continues to face complex internal and external challenges. These include high youth unemployment, gender inequality, water scarcity, and fiscal pressures (public debt exceeding 110 percent of gross domestic product (GDP)) as well as regional instability, a large refugee population, declining official development assistance (now around 10 percent of GDP) and a sharp decline in tourism revenues. Together, these factors have placed significant strain on both humanitarian response efforts and long-term development programming.

**II. Key themes of the visit**

**A. Inclusive Economic Development**

5. Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the region, with 63 percent of its population under the age of 30. This demographic profile presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the area of

employment, as youth unemployment stands at 45 percent and female labour force participation at 14 percent. As a small and open economy, Jordan remains highly exposed to external shocks and regional volatility, which continue to weigh on its development trajectory. In response, the Government has launched an ambitious Economic Modernization Vision (EMV) aimed at unlocking sustainable growth, attracting investment and creating one million jobs by promoting high-value sectors such as information and communications technology (ICT), tourism, green energy and advanced industries.

**6. SME growth and inclusive employment:** At the initiative of UNDP, the delegation participated in an economic roundtable with the former Minister of Digital Economy, private sector representatives, women beneficiaries and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). SMEs account for approximately 40-50 percent of Jordan's GDP and employ around 70 percent of the private sector workforce. Participants showcased United Nations-supported projects and their contribution to the implementation of the EMV and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across sectors. The discussion focused on SME-led job creation and green innovation, including efforts to foster youth and women's entrepreneurship. Since the launch of the National Entrepreneurial Policy, over 70 business incubators have been established across the country through government, development and private sector programmes. However, participants noted the challenge of retaining successful start-ups in the country, as many seek financing abroad to expand into new markets. To fully leverage private sector investment at scale, they emphasized the need for an ecosystem approach, improved de-risking mechanisms and the creation of a growth fund to enable transition beyond an SME-based economy toward one driven by transformation and innovation. Participants saw a key role for the United Nations as an integrator and convener to bring together the necessary actors for a comprehensive, multidimensional approach to economic development and local job creation.

**7. "Cash for Work" public schools project:** Implemented by UNOPS, this initiative has improved access to education and learning conditions for 500,000 students through the maintenance of over 400 public schools, including the installation of digital infrastructure. The project also created cash-for-work opportunities for more than 14,000 vulnerable Jordanians and Syrian refugees - among them nearly 4,000 women and 800 persons with disabilities - in partnership with Germany (KfW). Beneficiaries received on-the-job training to support their future integration into the labour market. Building on its success in Jordan, the partnership has been extended to Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and the State of Palestine to help address pressures on public school systems linked to increased student populations and regional displacement.

## **B. Social Protection/Health**

**8.** The evolving geopolitical environment in the region – including the situations in the Syrian Arab Republic, Gaza and the Westbank, and the Islamic Republic of Iran – continues to exert pressure on Jordan's economy, social systems and public services, particularly the health sector, which is already overstretched. Jordan continues to shoulder a disproportionate share of the regional displacement burden, hosting an estimated 1.3 million Syrians in addition to 2.3 million registered Palestine refugees. While Jordan has demonstrated remarkable generosity as a host country for more than a decade, government officials emphasized that the situation is no longer sustainable without increased donor support. Funding shortfalls, they cautioned, could have serious implications for stability and the provision of essential services, including housing, food, and health infrastructure.

**9. Zaatari Refugee Camp:** The delegation visited the Zaatari Refugee Camp, the world's largest camp for Syrian refugees. Established in 2012, it has since evolved into the fourth largest population centre in Jordan, hosting more than 65,000 residents, over half of whom are children, including approximately 23,000 born in the camp. In cooperation with UNHCR and other partners, UNFPA works to address significant disparities in sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) outcomes between refugees inside the camps and Jordanians, as well as refugees living outside the camps. Child marriage remains a major concern, accounting for 50-60 percent of registered marriages in the camp, representing a serious violation of girls' rights and constraining their future opportunities. Through direct engagement with women, girls and service providers, the delegation gained deeper insight into the experiences and challenges faced within the Women and Girls Safe Spaces supported by UNFPA. While approximately, 70 percent of UNFPA's work in Jordan is focused on humanitarian response, the agency continues to apply a

development lens to its interventions to help refugees build resilience and prepare for eventual, voluntary return.

10. Funding constraints, particularly following reductions in development assistance by the United States, are threatening the continuation of sexual and reproductive Health (SRH) and gender-based violence (GBV) services in the camp, alongside other essential services, as UNHCR's budget has also been significantly reduced. Several government officials reiterated the importance of maintaining international support for refugees in Jordan, noting that large-scale returns to the Syrian Arab Republic remain unlikely in the near term. Sustaining SRH and GBV services is vital not only for the well-being and protection of women and girls in the camps, but also from a demographic and public health perspective. With fertility rates in the camps nearly double those of the national average, further strain on Jordan's already overburdened health and social systems remain a pressing concern.

11. **Institute for Family Health:** In Karak, the delegation visited one of the centers participating in the Women-Friendly Health Centers Programme, which integrated gender-based violence (GBV) detection, referral services for survivors and respectful maternity care for marginalized groups. Integrating these services within community health centres serving entire families - rather than creating separate facilities for women – reduces social and cultural barriers that often prevent women from seeking help. For example, during a routine family medical visit, women can safely and discreetly access information and services related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and GBV in a comfortable, non-stigmatizing setting. This “one-stop-shop” approach promotes inclusion and accessibility, and helps to engage men constructively in discussions on GBV and family well-being. By embedding prevention and response services within existing community structures, the programme supports gradual shifts in social norms and attitudes toward gender equality, offering an alternative to punitive or complaint-based models of GBV protection.

12. UNFPA provides both technical and financial support to strengthen SRH and GBV services, though these efforts have been significantly affected by funding reductions, including the 35 percent cut following the withdrawal of United States funding. Despite these challenges, the initiative represents a strong example of sustainable, community-based engagement, as the model has now been adopted by the Ministries of Health and Social Development, reinforcing national ownership and institutionalization of integrated GBV and SRH services.

### C. Environment/ Food Security

13. Water scarcity poses an existential threat for Jordan, which is among the most water-scarce countries in the world. In response, the Government has placed food security and food systems transformation at the centre of its national development agenda, recognizing the strong interlinkages between water availability, climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

14. **Sustainable Fisheries:** The delegation visited a UNDP-supported sustainable development initiative in Aqaba that combines biodiversity conservation – including the protection of marine ecosystems and coral reefs – with the creation of economic opportunities for local fishing communities and the promotion of green tourism. The project demonstrates that efforts to raise awareness and protect marine biodiversity are most effective when local communities directly benefit from blue economy investments and nature-based solutions. In this context, UNDP has supported the local port authority through the provision of cold storage facilities, enabling improved fish quality and freshness, reducing post-harvest losses and enhancing the livelihoods and competitiveness of local fishers. This intervention has allowed producers to access export markets, while simultaneously contributing to the sustainable management of marine resources.

15. **Food system transformation:** Concluding the field visit, the delegation engaged with an innovative initiative aimed at promoting a just, inclusive and sustainable food system in Jordan. The country's food system is under increasing strain due to climate vulnerability, resource scarcity, high import dependency (approximately 80 percent), and persistent socio-economic challenges, including poverty, unemployment and inequality. Under the guidance of UNDP, Jordan is pursuing a transition towards a more resilient, equitable and sustainable food system through coordinated policymaking, the promotion of climate-smart agribusiness, and strengthened linkages across food, water, energy and waste systems, supported by

innovative financing mechanisms. This systems-based approach seeks to address structural challenges in an integrated manner, moving beyond fragmented and sector-specific interventions.

#### **D. Humanitarian support to Gaza (UN 2720 Mechanism for Gaza)**

16. In addition to advancing sustainable development and supporting more than three million refugees hosted by Jordan, the UNCT highlighted its role in facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to emergency operations across the region. This includes the deployment of life-saving supplies in close partnership with international donors and the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organisation (JHCO).

17. **Support to Jordan Corridor:** The delegation visited the JHCO warehouses in Al Ghabawi to gain first-hand insight into operationalization of the United Nations mechanism established pursuant to Security Council resolution 2720 (2023) for Gaza. The visit provided an overview of UNOPS-led efforts to establish essential infrastructure and procure critical equipment in support of the Jordan Corridor's operations. The delegation observed extensive warehouse facilities stocked with humanitarian goods prepared for onward transport. It was noted, however, that movement of supplies has been delayed due to prevailing circumstances beyond the control of the Jordanian authorities.

### **III. Observations and findings**

#### **A. Delivering as One**

18. The United Nations Resident Coordinator together with agency representatives in Jordan, has made notable progress in strengthening coordination through a range of inter-agency working groups established to jointly implement the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Throughout the visit, the delegation observed strong commitment at country level to advancing a more integrated approach to United Nations support, while also noting the practical complexities of translating system-wide coordination ambitions into operational realities in the field.

19. Despite declining resource availability, including significant reductions in funding for gender-related activities – particularly affecting UNFPA – Jordan continues to receive substantial official development assistance (ODA), estimated at approximately \$2.4 billion, largely through bilateral contributions and Syria crisis-related humanitarian financing. Nevertheless, the delegation observed that working in a more coherent and coordinated manner remains challenging, not only within the UNCT but also in engagement with international financial institutions (IFIs) and bilateral partners, given the increasingly constrained development financing environment. The Aqaba-Amman Water Desalination and Conveyance Project was cited as an illustrative example of a large-scale, strategically important initiative with significant social, economic and national security implications, particularly in addressing water scarcity. While other actors are leading this effort, the delegation noted limited exposure to the project during the visit and identified potential scope for the United Nations to more actively leverage its convening and policy advisory role in such nationally transformative initiatives. In a middle-income country context such as Jordan, this reinforces the importance of the United Nations focusing increasingly on policy support, coordination and systems-level engagement, alongside targeted project-based interventions.

#### **B. United Nations value proposition**

20. Discussions with government counterparts suggested that the United Nations is still perceived primarily through a humanitarian lens, particularly in relation to refugee support, rather than a strategic development partner. As noted by senior officials, including the Minister of Planning, institutions such as the World Bank continue to be viewed as leading actors on core development financing and reform agendas. In this context, articulating a clear and differentiated United Nations value proposition in a middle-income country such as Jordan remains challenging. Unlike other middle-income contexts where the United Nations footprint is relatively limited, the Organization's operational presence in Jordan has been comparatively substantial, peaking at \$1 billion in 2022, reflecting the country's strategic role in a

region affected by protracted crises.<sup>1</sup> While the United Nations Resident Coordinator and agency representatives maintain constructive relationships with government counterparts, engagements often appear to be driven by transactional interactions with major bilateral donors, such as the European Union, particularly around large-scale national priorities including water desalination initiatives. Similar dynamics were observed in the context of the Public Sector Modernization Plan, where UNDP contributed innovative policy approaches at an early stage, but implementation preferences ultimately shifted towards large international consulting firms.

21. In this operating environment, the delegation observed that it can be challenging for the Resident Coordinator to bring the United Nations system around a coherent development narrative for engagement with the government counterparts, particularly where government preferences favour direct engagement with individual agencies that have dedicated resources and implementation mandates. Government interlocutors expressed limited appetite for collective or joint United Nations discussions, preferring agency-specific engagements aligned with concrete delivery. These observations underscore the importance of ensuring the United Nations reform discussions, including those related to UN80, remain grounded in field realities and avoid a one-size-fits-all approaches, recognizing that country contexts and government expectations vary significantly.

### **C. United Nations Reform**

22. Throughout the visit, the delegation noted mixed perceptions and concerns related to UN80, expressed by both United Nations entities and government counterparts. A common concern was that reform-related decisions might be taken centrally and implemented without sufficient consultation with country-level stakeholders. From a system-wide perspective, the scale of the United Nations presence in Jordan – comprising 29 entities – was observed to create both opportunities and challenges. While efforts are under way to strengthen collaboration and better leverage comparative advantages, the delegation noted areas of mandate overlap, competition for limited resources and high operational overheads associated with maintaining multiple separate entities. The visit also highlighted potential scope for operational efficiency gains. Practical arrangements during the field visit, such as the use of separate agency vehicles rather than shared transport, served as a tangible illustration of opportunities to strengthen coordination and reduce duplication, while also fostering closer collaboration and information exchange among United Nations entities.

### **D. Cross-country cooperation**

23. Many of the challenges facing Jordan are closely linked to regional dynamics and conflicts in neighboring countries, including the Syrian Arab Republic, Gaza, Iraq. However, the delegation observed that United Nations operations in Jordan continue to be planned, implemented and assessed through national-level frameworks, notably the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) and individual country programme documents (CPDs), with limited evidence of structured cross-country programming or coordination, beyond periodic regional consultations. Given the strong regional spillover effects on Jordan and the presence of eight regional offices based in Amman, the delegation noted that cross-country cooperation does not appear to be systematically or proactively pursued. In this context, the absence of engagement from certain regional coordination structures, including the regional Development Coordination Office (DCO), during the visit was seen as a missed opportunity to advance more integrated, regionally informed approaches to common challenges.

### **E. Scaling for transformational impact**

24. The delegation observed a number of promising initiatives – such as those supporting small-scale fishers in Aqaba – that demonstrate strong potential for scaling up through public-private partnerships. To achieve transformational impact, however, several challenges need to be addressed. These include aligning the objectives of local authorities (which may seek private sector delivery of public services) with those of the private sector (which must ensure commercial viability), as well as supporting small and

<sup>1</sup> While United Nations operations peaked at \$1.01 billion in 2022, these figures declined to 750.8 million in 2023, and 679.8 million in 2024. This reduction has been due to changes in the overall global aid environment and the shifting of resources toward humanitarian assistance in Gaza.

medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to develop bankable projects. Strengthening these enabling conditions would help unlock blended finance, foster regional cooperation, and mobilize private capital at scale in support of green growth and sustainable development.

#### F. Gaza

25. With regard to humanitarian assistance to Gaza, the delegation observed a disconnect between political assurances regarding humanitarian access at the international level and the operational realities on the ground. The Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization (JHCO) continues to face significant constraints, resulting in humanitarian supplies accumulating in warehouses rather than reaching affected civilian populations. The delegation noted that these challenges could impact the application of humanitarian principles as well as have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian response.

### IV. Recommendations

26. **Strengthen cooperation with national and local authorities:** continue to deepen collaboration between United Nations entities and central and local government authorities to ensure sustained alignment with national priorities and policy frameworks.

27. **Focus on strategic impact:** In a context of declining resources and consistent calls from the Secretary-General and Member States for a more strategic, impactful and cost-effective United Nations, agencies should increasingly concentrate on areas of specialized technical expertise and comparative advantage. This includes shaping policy dialogue and co-creating solutions – such as UNDP’s work on Integrated National Financing Frameworks, highlighted by the Minister of Planning – rather than delivering generic projects that can be implemented by international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) or governments.

28. **Strengthen impact monitoring and knowledge management:** Establish or reinforce mechanisms to systematically assess the outcomes and impact of United Nations-supported interventions, in partnership with government and other stakeholders, and to capture lessons learned in order to inform scaling up of effective approaches.

29. **Enhance inter-agency coordination and strategic alignment:** Promote deeper joint programming and shared impact measurement across agencies to better leverage comparative advantages and maximize collective results.

- **Promote synergies and joint programming:** Where possible, agencies should draw on in-house United Nations expertise across entities. For example, rather than engaging external consultants, projects could integrate technical expertise from sister agencies, reducing duplication, strengthening coherence and enabling smaller entities to benefit from the operational scale of larger ones while maintaining their mandates and visibility.
- **Advance joint evaluations:** The Executive Board may wish to explore ways to incentivize inter-agency collaboration, including through greater use of joint evaluations based on collective contributions to the UNSDCF, rather than assessing agency performance solely through individual country programme documents.
- **Expand co-location and shared services:** Increased use of common premises and shared back-office services, particularly through larger operational agencies, could reduce costs, improve efficiency and foster closer collaboration that supports joint programming.

30. **Prioritize local capacity-building and civil society engagement:** Continue investing in strengthening the capacities of local authorities, civil society organizations and community groups to manage, adapt and sustain United Nations-supported interventions. Ongoing engagement of government, NGOs, civil society actors and volunteers in programme implementation and adaptation is essential to ensure resilience and long-term sustainability.

31. **Strengthen women’s empowerment:** Systematically enhance women’s participation across all programmes as a critical driver of labour market inclusion and gender equality.

32. **Balance humanitarian and development efforts:** While humanitarian support remains essential, particularly in light of regional crises, equal attention should be given to longer-term SDG-aligned development initiatives to ensure coherence between immediate response and sustainable development objectives.

33. **Scale up innovative approaches:** Expand and replicate successful models by bringing together relevant partners to promote efficient, scalable and context-appropriate solutions that can be adapted across sectors and locations.

34. **Promote proactive engagement in United Nations reform efforts:** United Nations entities should not wait for reform-related decisions to be defined centrally, but instead actively contribute to UN80 objectives through practical, bottom-up initiatives at the country level. This includes advancing joint programming, shared services and other measures that enhance efficiency, coherence and impact, in line with system-wide reform ambitions.

## V. Conclusions

35. While a field visit of limited duration cannot provide a comprehensive overview of all United Nations activities in a country, the engagements during this mission offered valuable insights into the concrete work of the UNCT and the individual agencies in Jordan. The visit highlighted both areas of meaningful progress and ongoing challenges. Throughout the week, the delegation observed the resilience and determination of the Jordanian people and the refugees they host, alongside strong efforts by United Nations entities, national and local authorities, and civil society actors to support development outcomes, particularly for the most vulnerable populations.

36. Looking ahead, the delegation underscored the importance of sustained strategic dialogue between the United Nations system and the Government of Jordan to further clarify where the organizations can add the greatest value in support of transformational and sustainable development outcomes, particularly in a context of increasingly constrained resources.