

# A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, Mount Lebanon Governorate

---



الجمهورية اللبنانية  
وزارة الشؤون الاجتماعية

In partnership with the  
Ministry of Social Affairs



UN-HABITAT



Ambasciata d'Italia  
Beirut

Funded by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation



AGENZIA ITALIANA  
PER LA COOPERAZIONE  
ALLO SVILUPPO

# A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, Mount Lebanon Governorate

---

**Citation format:** UN-Habitat Lebanon (2023) *A Road Map Towards a Socioeconomic Development Plan for the Union of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, Mount Lebanon Governorate*, Beirut: UN-Habitat Lebanon.

Copyright © 2023 UN-Habitat. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without prior permission of UN-Habitat.

Cover photo © Rami Al Banna (2023)



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.

For more information:

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

UN House, 5th Floor, Riad El Solh, Beirut, Lebanon

Tel.: +961 1 978398

Email: [unhabitat-lebanon@un.org](mailto:unhabitat-lebanon@un.org)

Website: [www.unhabitat.org/Lebanon](http://www.unhabitat.org/Lebanon)



This publication was made possible with the support of the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.

## Credits and acknowledgements

This booklet, which outlines strategic directions for the local socioeconomic development of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, 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-Aala–Bhamdoun; representatives of the union; Aley SDC coordinator 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.

Appreciation is also extended to the heads and representatives of municipalities, civil society associations, sports clubs, scouts' groups, and other local entities and community members. UN-Habitat is grateful for their active role and valuable participation in the consultations undertaken leading to the completion of this publication.

**Project manager:** Lady Habchy

**Authors:** Nissrine Abdel Samad, Elias Abi Najm, Sahar Shaya, Aziza Yassine

**Editors:** Alia Chaaban, Nanor Karageozian, Tarek Osseiran

**Reviewers:** Taina Christiansen, Lady Habchy

**Graphic designer:** Rachelle Abi Ramia

**GIS:** Charbel Abou Chakra, Racha Serhal

## 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-Aala–Bhamdoun .....	16
Foreword by the Ministry of Social Affairs.....	4	Population overview .....	20
Foreword by the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation.....	5	<b>Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Foreword by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in Lebanon .....	6	Water .....	21
List of tables and figures .....	9	Roads and transportation .....	21
Abbreviations and acronyms.....	9	Buildings and facilities .....	21
Executive summary .....	10	Electricity.....	22
<b>Project overview .....</b>	<b>11</b>	Sanitation and solid waste management....	22
Project objectives .....	11	Telecommunications .....	23
Expected outcomes .....	11	<b>Social services: Current state and recommendations for improvement .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Timeframe.....	11	Health care .....	23
Geographical coverage.....	11	Education .....	23
Beneficiaries .....	11	<b>Local economy and livelihoods: Current state.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>11</b>	Public sector .....	25
Selection of UoMs.....	12	Private sector.....	25
Preparation and training.....	14	Crafts and vocations .....	25
Data collection, analysis, and validation .....	15	Agriculture.....	26

Industry .....	26
Trade.....	26
Tourism .....	27
Remittances from abroad .....	27
<b>Recommendations for sectors identified as key for future local socioeconomic development.....</b>	<b>28</b>
Agriculture.....	30
Tourism .....	34
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>

# List of tables and figures

**Table 1.** 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-Aala–Bhamdoun with its municipalities .....	16
<b>Figure 4.</b> Digital elevation model (in metres) for the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun .....	17
<b>Figure 5.</b> Satellite image of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun .....	18
<b>Figure 6.</b> Land cover/land use as a percentage of the total area of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun .....	19
<b>Figure 7.</b> Land cover/land use within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun.....	19
<b>Figure 8.</b> Distribution of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun population by age .....	20
<b>Figure 9.</b> Distribution of employment by sector in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun.....	25

# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>AICS</b>	Italian Agency for Development Cooperation
<b>AUB-NCC</b>	American University of Beirut's Nature Conservation Centre
<b>CNRS-L</b>	National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon
<b>CDR</b>	Council for Development and Reconstruction
<b>DEM</b>	Digital elevation model
<b>DMO</b>	Management Destination Organization
<b>EDL</b>	Électricité du Liban
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic information system
<b>IMF</b>	Independent Municipal Fund
<b>MoSA</b>	Ministry of Social Affairs
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>SDC</b>	Social development centre
<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
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development



## Executive summary

The preparation of this booklet, which outlines strategic directions of the Union of Municipalities (UoM) of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun in Mount Lebanon 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 coordination 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 coordination 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-Aala–Bhamdoun, 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-Aala–Bhamdoun, 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.

### 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)

## 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 project for UoMs to start the journey of enhancing their local socioeconomic

### 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.

<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.

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:

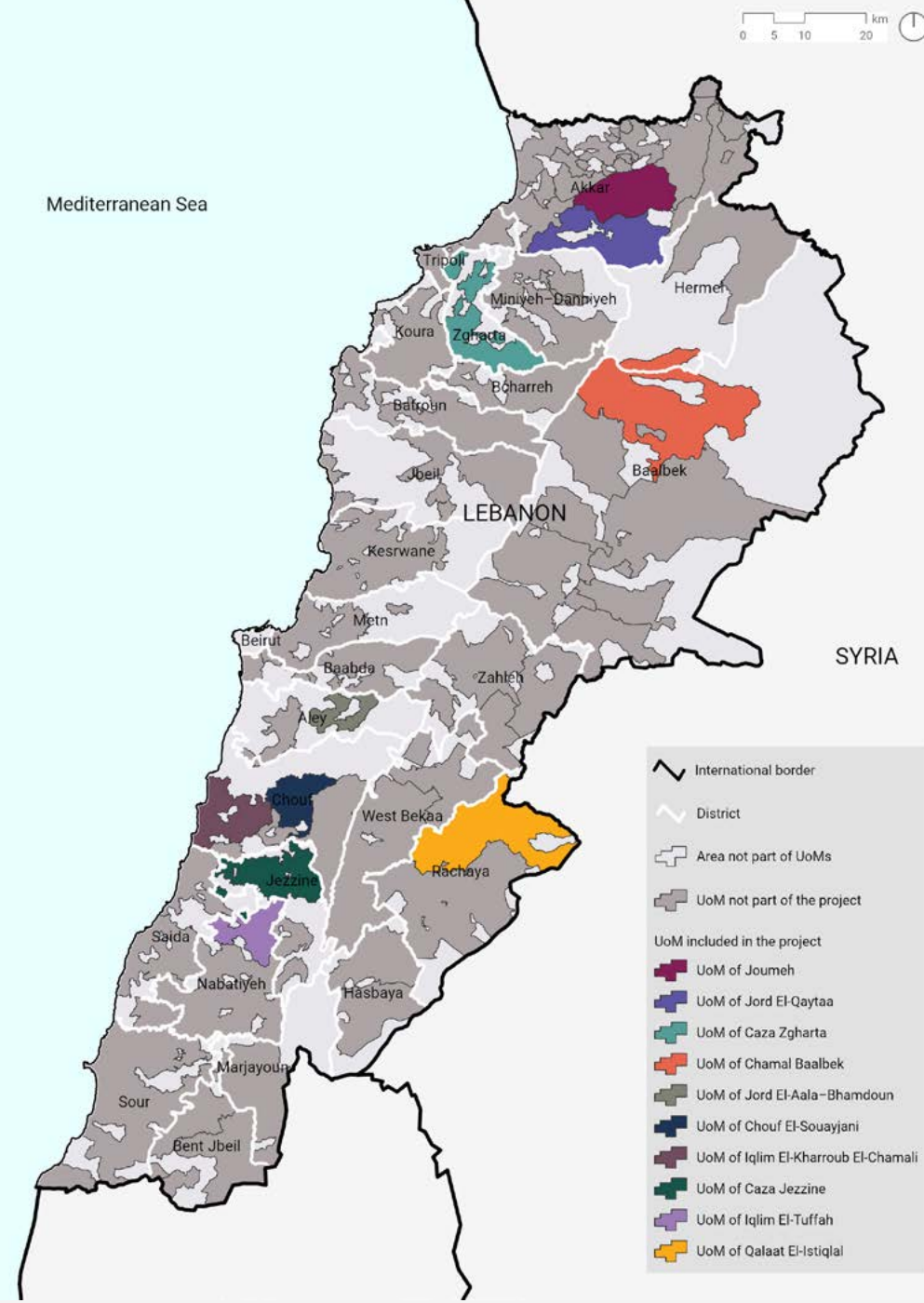
**Selection of UoMs**

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.

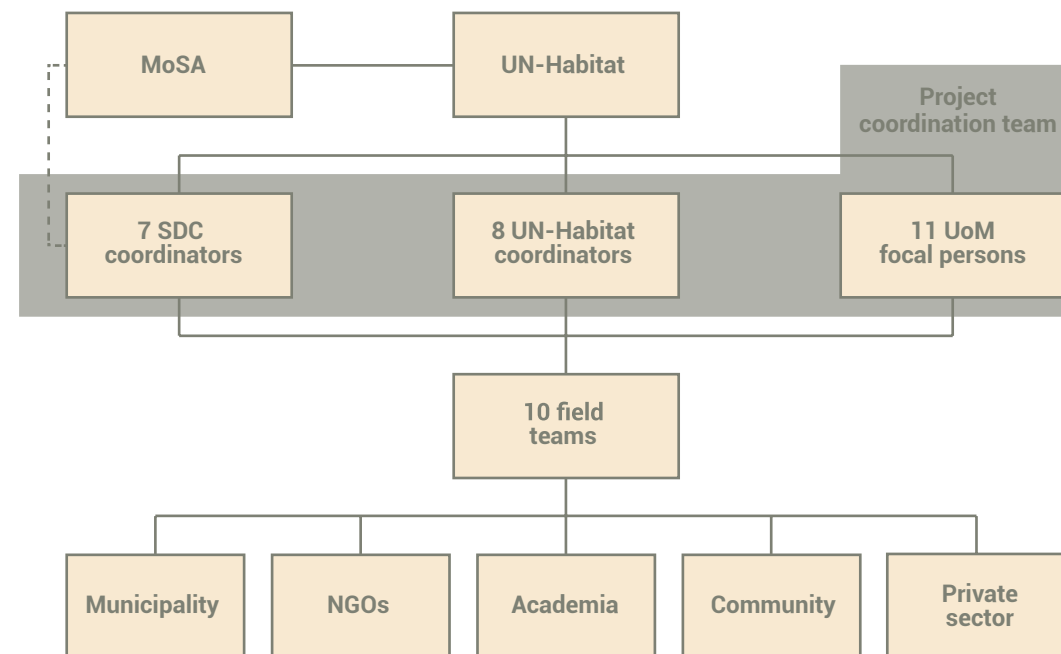


Figure 2. Stakeholders involved in the development of booklets as part of the project.

## 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.

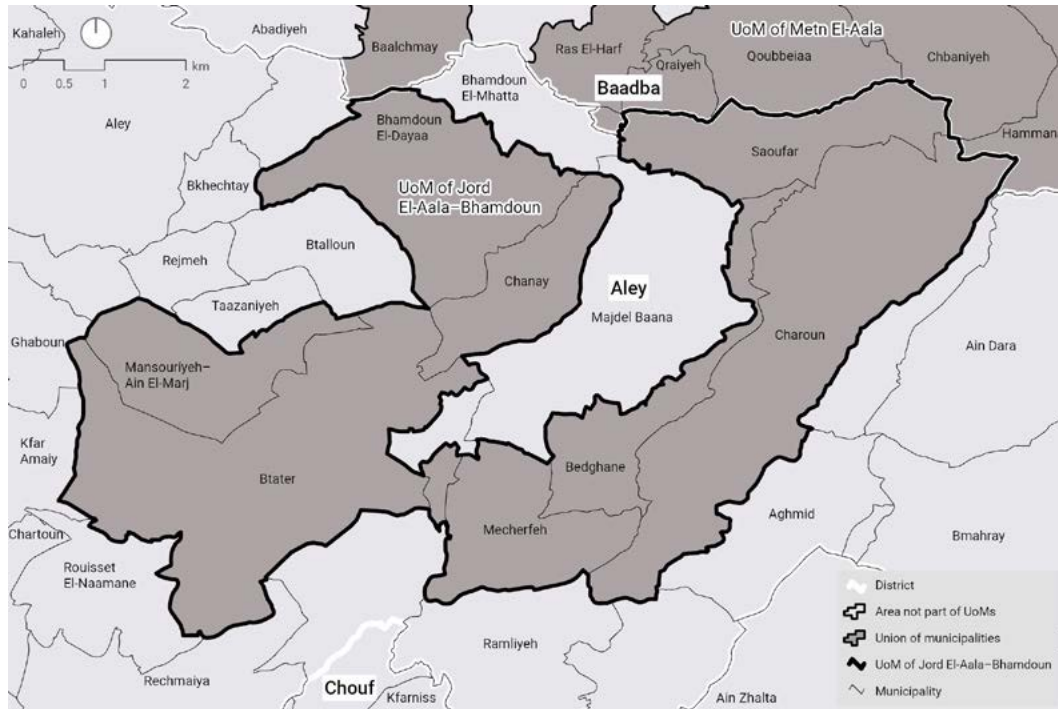
<sup>5</sup> Participatory rapid appraisal is a learning process that empowers people to conduct their own analysis to create the information base they need for participatory planning and action.

# Overview of the Union (UoM) of Jord El-Aala–Municipalities Bhamdoun

## Geographical location and land cover/land use

Located in Chouf District of Mount Lebanon Governorate, the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun consists of eight municipalities: Saoufar, Bhamdoun El-Dayaa, Chanay, Charoun, Bedghane, Mecherfeh, Btater, and Mansouriyeh Bhamdoun–

Ain El-Marj. The size of the municipal councils varies; some have 9 members (Bedghane, Chanay, Mansouriyeh Bhamdoun–Ain El-Marj), others 12 members (Saoufar and Mecherfeh), and others 15 members (Btater, Charoun, Bahmdoun El-Dayaa).

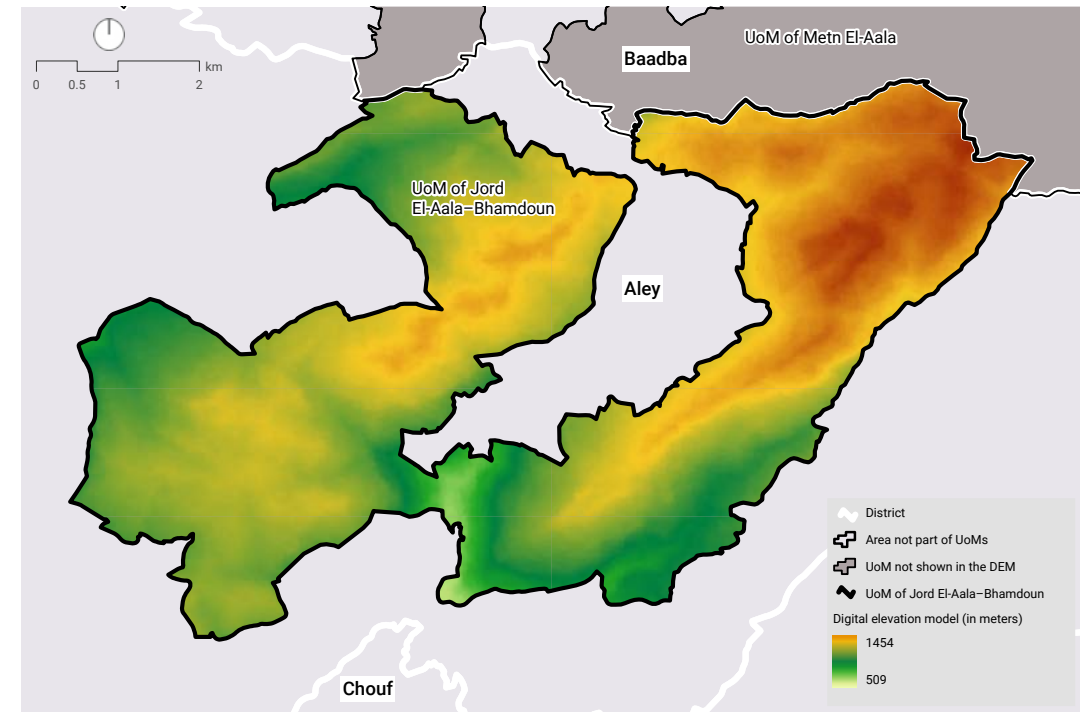


**Figure 3.** UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun with its municipalities.

Source: The boundaries of the UoMs based on their municipal composition were updated by the UN-Habitat GIS team, based on available data from the survey with the municipalities, open sources, and other relevant secondary data sources.

The total area of the UoM is approximately 38.76 square kilometres, and its elevation varies from 509 metres above sea level in Bhamdoun, to 1,454 metres at the highest point in Charoun (Figure 4). The UoM is surrounded by mountain ranges, bordered to the east by Aghmid, Azouniyeh and Ain Dara; to the west by Baalchmay and Abadiyeh; to the north by Hammana and Mdeyrej; and to the south by Ramliyeh and Ain El-Halazoun.

The UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is distinguished by its central geographical location in Lebanon, being close to Beirut as well as the region of the Bekaa and other areas in Lebanon, both to the north and the south. Additionally, the main road that passes through the entrance of Charoun leads to the Chouf, to the area of Dahr El-Baydar, to the Metn El-Aala, and to the Bekaa region.

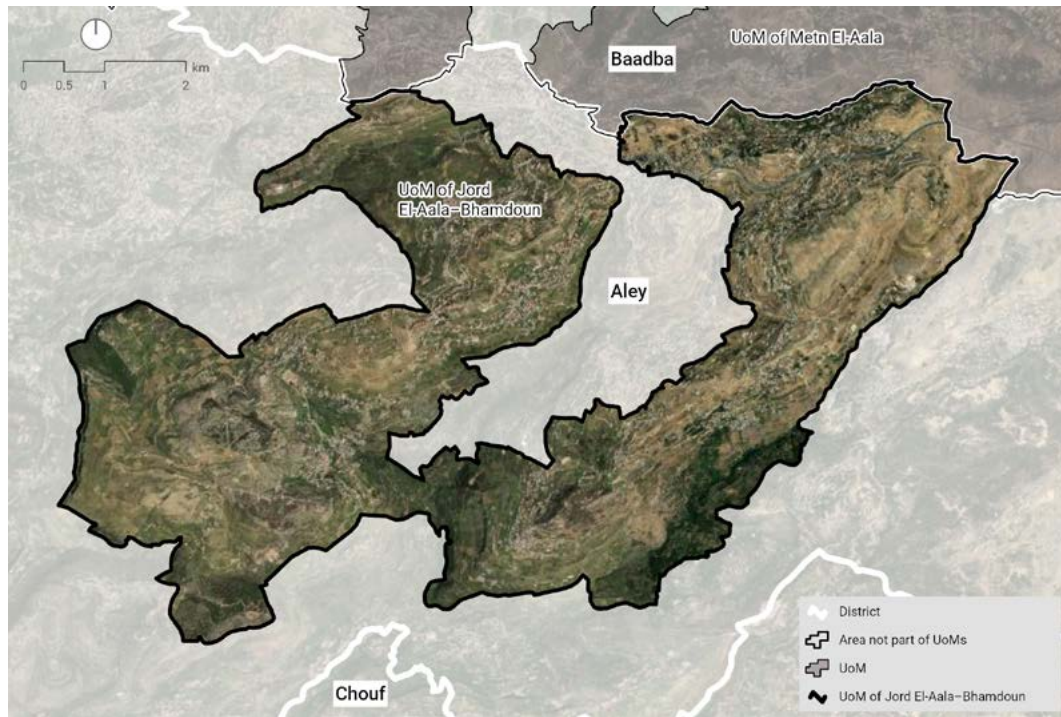


**Figure 4.** Digital elevation model (in metres) for the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun.

Source: Digital elevation model (DEM) taken from the Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (ASTER) Global Digital Elevation Model Version 3 (GDEM V3), with a spatial resolution of 30 metres, downloaded from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) website (<https://lpdaac.usgs.gov/products/astgtmv003/>).







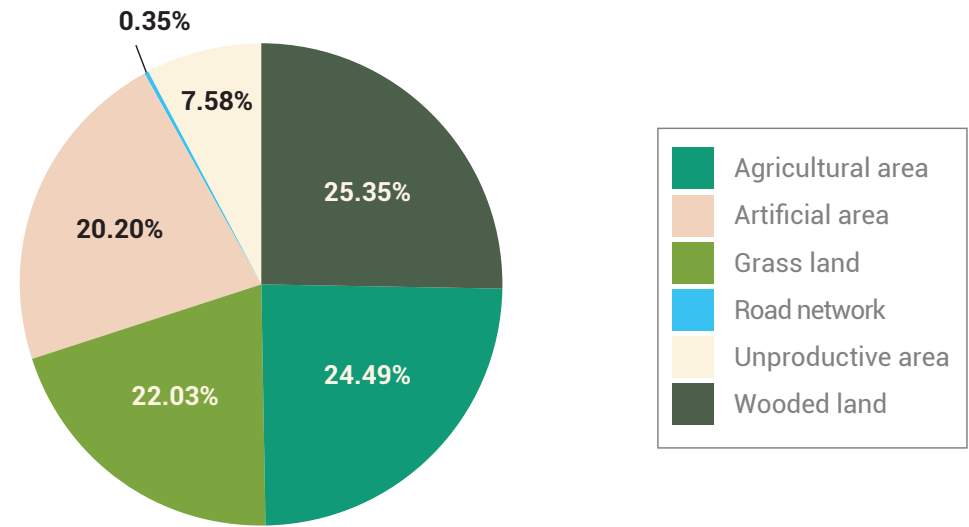
**Figure 5.** Satellite image of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun. Source: The high-resolution satellite image displayed in this map was extracted from Esri online World Imagery.

The UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is characterized by its diverse natural landscape, encompassing vast areas that are either lush and green or barren, with mountains, valleys and numerous springs. The UoM primarily relies on tourism and agriculture, with all its towns and villages being distinctly rural and resort-like in nature. The towns and villages within the union, as well as neighbouring regions, share certain resources, particularly water sources for irrigation (e.g. springs between Mecherfeh and Ramliyah). Some properties owned by residents of Mecherfeh are located within the boundaries of Ramliyah. This is also the case between residents of Ramliyah and Charoun, and between Mecherfeh and Majdal Baana. Some villages and towns in the UoM are connected

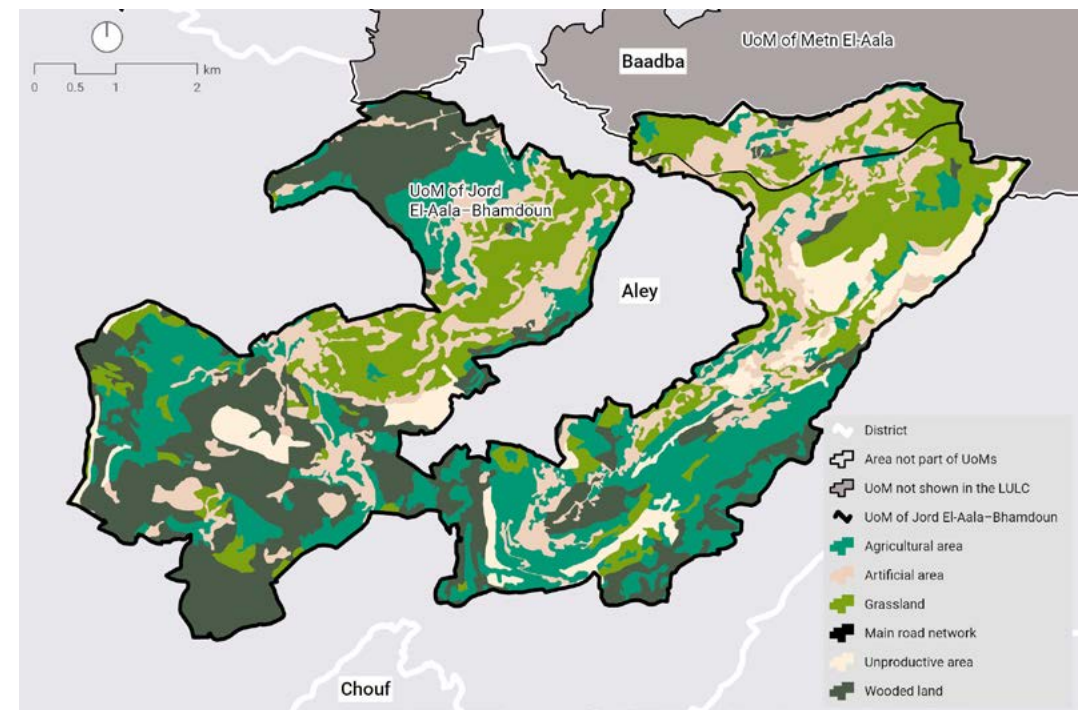
to one another through roads that were carved during the Israeli occupation and the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). These roads are narrow and require expansion and maintenance.

Artificial areas within the UoM account for 20.2 per cent (7.83 km<sup>2</sup>) of the total area, while wooded lands cover 25.35 per cent (9.82 km<sup>2</sup>) and agricultural areas span 24.49 per cent (9.49 km<sup>2</sup>). Unproductive areas (unused plots) make up 7.58 per cent (2.94 km<sup>2</sup>), the main road network 0.35 per cent (0.13 km<sup>2</sup>), and grassland 22.03 per cent (8.54 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 Center for Remote Sensing in the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon (CNRS-L) in 2017. According to 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. “Main road network” includes the international highways.



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



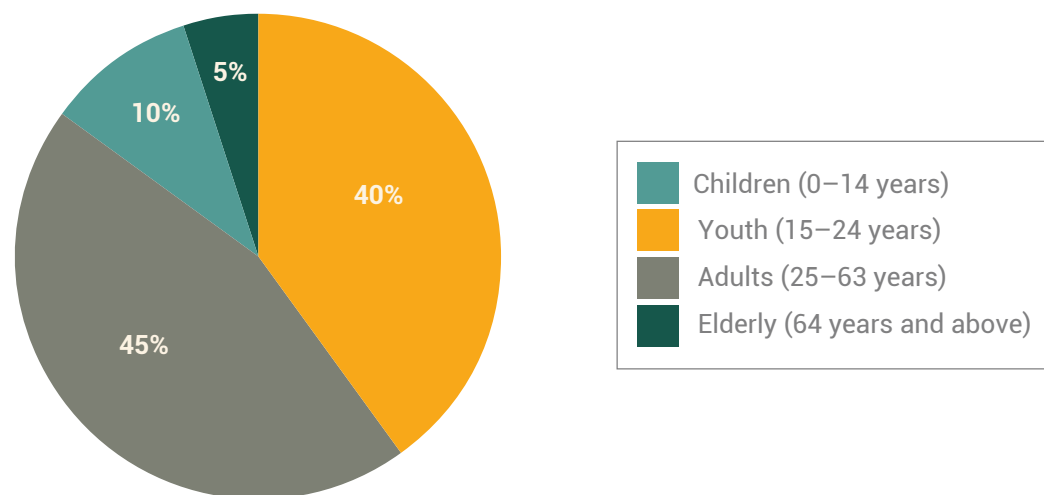
**Figure 7.** Land cover/land use within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun. Source: UN-Habitat (2023), adapted from Land Cover/Land Use Map of Lebanon, scale 1:20000, Classification System Level 1, National Centre for Remote Sensing, CNRS-L, (2017)



## Population overview

The estimated total population of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is approximately 57,900 people, with non-Lebanese (mostly Syrian refugees) constituting around 0.6 per cent, according to surveys conducted with the eight municipalities of the UoM. Non-Lebanese live in homes in urban and rural areas, often side by side with Lebanese; there are no refugee camps within the UoM.

The population of the UoM is characterized by a relatively high percentage of youth and adults, accounting for around 85 per cent of the total population, according to the survey filled by the municipalities' mayors (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Distribution of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun population by age.

Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

Approximately 20 per cent of the registered population in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun live outside of Lebanon – in the Gulf countries, Canada, Africa, North and South America, Australia, Eastern and Western Europe – according to the survey conducted with the eight municipalities of the union. The process of emigration began in the mid-19th century due to economic, social and political changes in Mount Lebanon. This emigration wave was primarily directed towards the United States and Latin America, then expanded to include Australia, Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Migration increased just before World War I began. Following Lebanon's independence in 1943 and until the beginning of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975, the primary destination for Lebanese emigrants from the union was the oil-exporting Arab countries, especially Kuwait, in addition to countries in Africa and Australia. During the years of the Lebanese Civil War from 1975 to 1990, emigration increased significantly and affected approximately 30 per cent of the population. Emigration has continued to rise in recent years due to the acute economic, financial and political crises.

## Basic services: Current state and recommendations for improvement

The provision of basic services in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun faces numerous challenges, and the severity of these challenges varies from one sector to another. Like the rest of Lebanon, the quality and quantity of basic services have deteriorated due to the ongoing 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 are available in most towns of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, and their overall condition is considered good with the risk of deterioration because of their age of installation and the absence of maintenance. These networks are managed by the Barouk Water Authority.

Like other areas of Lebanon, the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun suffers especially during the summer from water shortages/absence of publicly supplied water due to frequent power outages and high fuel prices. In the town of Chanay, geological studies more than seven years ago revealed the presence of groundwater in several locations within the municipality's jurisdiction. The municipality tried for years to obtain assistance from state institutions and many donor organizations to dig an artesian well and build a tank for spring water in these locations. However, all these attempts were unsuccessful, leading the municipality and the residents of Chanay to decide to implement these projects at their own expense. A committee was hence formed, in cooperation with Chanay Municipality, named the Artesian Well Digging and Tank Construction Committee in Chanay, which began collecting donations from Chanay residents and expatriates. Thanks to these efforts and the contribution of a generous benefactor, an artesian well was dug in 2022 within a property provided by the municipality, and Chanay obtained a significant quantity of water, solving the water shortage problem to a large extent. As for Saoufar, it benefits from its natural springs in addition to water from the Barouk Water Authority. The Ministry of Energy and Water sought to drill an artesian well in Saoufar ten years ago, but the project wasn't completed.

Another challenge faced by the UoM in this sector is the uneven distribution of water, the

aged and deteriorating network, especially in the context of the shortage of employees in Barouk Water Authority, which is responsible for monitoring, maintenance and addressing these issues.

Based on the consultation meetings with different stakeholders and on the information collected during the project, ensuring the maintenance of the water network and securing alternative energy sources will help overcome many of the above-mentioned challenges.

### Roads and transportation

The condition of roads within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is generally acceptable, but many of them lack sufficient nighttime lighting. Additionally, rural roads need development since it is negatively affecting the growth of the agriculture sector and hindering the access of firefighting vehicles in the event of wildfires. The residents rely mainly on private transportation due to the absence of public transportation. Therefore, local stakeholders engaged in this project considered it essential to enhance traffic safety on roads and ensure their maintenance, as well as provide nighttime street lighting.

### Buildings and facilities

Most buildings and establishments within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun consist of three to four floors. Traditional roofing materials like clay tiles are used in some villages within the UoM, such as Chanay, Btater and Bhamdoun, which have managed to preserve this tradition. Non-residential facilities are relatively few in number and are mostly confined to the ground floors of buildings. They typically include small

commercial shops or workshops (blacksmiths, carpenters, mechanics, bakers, etc.).

There are numerous historic houses, particularly in Saoufar, but a large number of them are abandoned due to migration and inheritance problems (e.g. high number of heirs), among other factors. This lack of care and maintenance results in the deterioration of these buildings.

As for housing tenure types, the majority of the population resides in privately owned houses. Rented houses are relatively few, and their number increases during the summer when tourists occupy them.

Preserving and ensuring the maintenance of the buildings of architectural heritage is a significant challenge faced by the union. There are also issues related to encroachments on public property and legal violations related to construction within the union.

One general recommendation made by the stakeholders who participated in the project was that municipalities and the UoM could limit the unplanned urban sprawl through the development/update and implementation of a proper master plan that covers the whole UoM.

## Electricity

The public electricity infrastructure is in a relatively decent condition, but it requires cable maintenance. Residents rely on the power supply provided by the Electricité du Liban (EDL), in addition to subscriptions to private generators. Some electrical cables have been repeatedly subjected to theft in some villages, and some other villages suffer from fuel shortages and encroachments on the public electricity network. In the town of Bedghane, a solar power field was created with funding from the American University of Beirut's Nature Conservation Centre (AUB-NCC) to provide the community with reliable electricity.

Therefore, to empower municipalities to contribute to local economic and social development, local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it essential to improve the state of the electricity networks, along with other basic services.

## Sanitation and solid waste management

According to a consultation session with relevant local stakeholders, some municipalities within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun are not connected to sewage networks, and only have septic tanks requiring periodic pumping to remove their contents. With regard to solid waste management, it is a significant problem for the UoM, incurring substantial financial burdens – about half of the income that the union receives from the Independent Municipal Fund (IMF).<sup>7</sup> Private companies collect waste from bins and containers within the towns and transport it to the landfill located in Costa Brava.<sup>8</sup> Chanay Municipality, in collaboration with the Majdel Baana Municipality, sought to establish a waste sorting and treatment plant, but the project faced obstacles and stopped. With regard to the sanitation situation, one key recommendation voiced by local stakeholders who participated in the project was to work on the implementation of the sewage plan, to urge the relevant official bodies to create sewage networks and treatment plants in the area, adhering to scientific standards and specifications during their construction.

## Telecommunications

Cellular and internet services in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun are below average due to the lack of maintenance, fuel shortages, and frequent power outages affecting the transmission stations. Moreover, the reduction in the value of the

salaries of employees in this sector leads to work stoppages and disruptions in workplace attendance, which in turn affect the provision of cellular and internet services.

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 are provided in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun through a total of five government and private health centres. The cost of the services provided by these centres is moderate, but their equipment is in need of maintenance, and some require new equipment. In addition, local stakeholders in the UoM identified other challenges in the health-care sector, such as the unavailability of medicines; a shortage of human, administrative and medical resources; and a lack of the necessary fuel for the operation of health-care centres.

Based on discussions with stakeholders, some of the recommendations suggested were related to providing alternative sources of energy and supporting the provision of medicines.

## Education

There are 10 public and private schools across the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun. According to a consultation with relevant stakeholders, the quality of educational services is generally considered good, which is mainly reflected in consistently positive results in official examinations. Many school premises require rehabilitation and equipment. Parking facilities are not available

in some schools (such as Bedghane School and Saoufar Secondary School); this poses a risk to children when entering and exiting the school premises. Residents face high school fees, particularly in private schools, while public schools are almost free. Most public schools have not received any in-kind or financial assistance from municipalities due to a lack of financial resources, even though the main governmental entity that is in charge of supporting these schools is the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

Another challenge facing the education sector includes the lack of energy sources for most schools. Also, most teachers have not been receiving their payments in a timely manner in light of the ongoing acute economic crisis. Furthermore, there are no technical institutes or universities in the UoM; most students find it difficult to access the nearest university in Aley or Beirut, given the high transportation costs. One key recommendation proposed by local stakeholders who participated in the project was to provide alternative sources of energy to education facilities. Another recommendation was to reserve parking facilities for school buses to ensure the safety of the students.

<sup>7</sup> The IMF is one of the sources of finance for municipalities and UoMs in Lebanon. Fees collected by the government on behalf of the municipalities are aggregated in the IMF, from which money is then redistributed back to municipalities and UoMs.

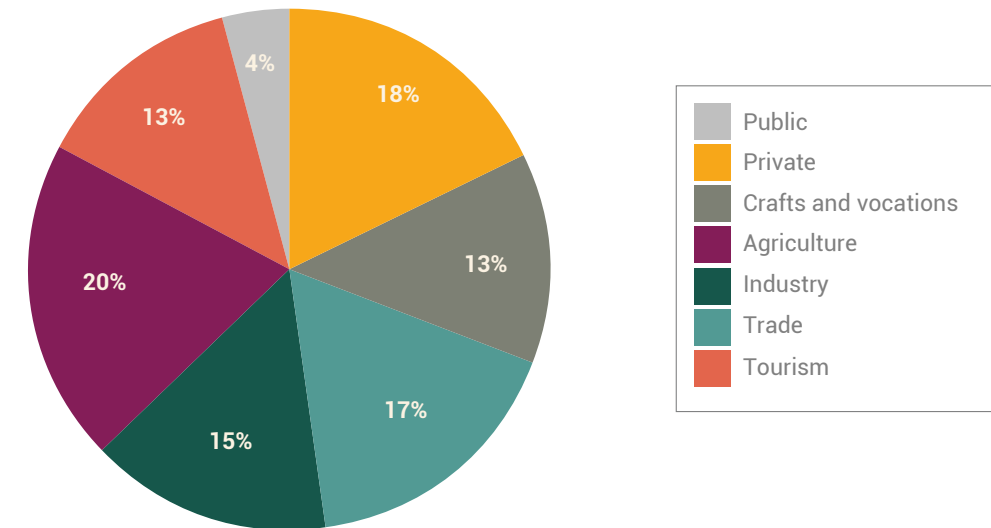
<sup>8</sup> The Costa Brava landfill, located near Rafik El-Hariri International Airport, was opened in April 2016. It is one of the two landfills that have been proposed by the Lebanese government as a solution to the eight-month solid waste crisis that the country went through in 2015.





## 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-Aala–Bhamdoun, 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-Aala–Bhamdoun. 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-Aala–Bhamdoun.

Source: Survey conducted with municipalities.

### Public sector

Approximately 4 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is employed in the public sector, according to the survey conducted within the UoM (Figure 9). Those employed in the public sector are within the age group of 25 to 64 years. In terms of gender distribution, 60 per cent of the public sector employees are males and 40 per cent are females, according to data collected from the UoM. Residents of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun who are employed in the public sector work in a wide range of institutions, including the military, security forces, ministries, and public schools.

### Private sector

The private sector represents around 18 per cent of the workforce in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, according to the survey conducted within the UoM (Figure 9). Thus, this sector constitutes a significant source of

income for many households in the union. It includes employment in banks, laboratories, factories, associations, foreign organizations and other private companies, with the majority of them located outside the union. The workforce employed in the private sector is evenly distributed in terms of gender.

### Crafts and vocations

The percentage of workers in different crafts and vocations is estimated to be around 13 per cent of the total workforce, according to the survey conducted within the UoM (Figure 9). In terms of age groups, it is estimated – based on survey results – that some workers employed in crafts and vocations are below 18. In terms of gender distribution, females reportedly make up the majority (70 per cent) and the remaining 30 per cent are reportedly males. Prominent occupations in this sector include carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, home masonry, mechanics and



construction, based on information collected from representatives of the municipalities and the union.

## Agriculture

The contribution of agriculture to family income in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun varies. In some areas, 10 per cent of the workforce works in this sector, while in other places like Btater, it can be as high as 35 per cent. On average, it is around 20 per cent of the workforce works in this sector (see Figure 9). According to information from the union, the majority of workers in this sector are adult males. Agricultural lands cover about 1 km<sup>2</sup> (2 per cent) of the union's total area, as mentioned above (Figures 6 and 7). Various crops are cultivated, including olives, grapes, apples, figs, carobs, walnuts, cherries, peaches, dates, quinces, pears and tomatoes, cucumber, as well as some legumes. These crops are grown in all municipalities of the union.

There are three agricultural cooperatives in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun:

1. The agricultural cooperative in Charoun was established in 1970 through contributions from the local community. It did not receive support or assistance from external sources and faced periods of interruption due to the recent crises but has recently resumed its activities. The cooperative is licensed, registered with the government, and involved in various types of agricultural practices. It also works on providing fertilizers, agricultural medicines and irrigation channels to its members. In addition, it is involved in road construction needed for agriculture in valleys and remote, difficult-to-reach areas. The cooperative's aim is to establish an olive oil press and produce canned products, but support is needed in light of the ongoing crises.
2. Another agricultural cooperative is in Btater. It was founded in 1990 through personal efforts and does not receive support from the government or any other entity. The cooperative is focused on planting fruit trees, providing fertilizers and agricultural medicines to farmers, as well as planting forest trees in some communal lands where it is not possible to grow fruit trees. The cooperative couldn't support livestock and beekeeping because it lacked financial funds. The cooperative also calls for the establishment of an institutional structure that facilitates coordination among all agricultural cooperatives.

3. Chanay Municipality, under the leadership of its mayor, sought to establish an agricultural cooperative in the town and registered a large number of farmers. The municipality also reached out to the head of the Agriculture Department at the Ministry of Agriculture in order to formally register this cooperative. However, circumstances linked to the ongoing crises over the past three years have hindered the completion of the registration process of this cooperative. Thus, the cooperative has not received official recognition and registration by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Many stakeholders who participated in consultative meetings conducted during the project mentioned that the main challenges in the agriculture sector include water scarcity, poor agricultural roads, a lack of agricultural expertise, rising production costs, climate change, frequent fires in agricultural lands, marketing difficulties, high labour costs, foreign competition, and the use of toxic substances by farmers that affect beekeeping.

## Industry

The percentage of workers who are engaged in the industry sector in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is 15 per cent of the workforce, according to information collected from the UoM (Figure 9). In terms of age distribution of the workers in the industry sector, 50 per cent of the workers are 30 to 50 years old, evenly distributed by gender.

The primary industries in the UoM are focused on the production of stone and iron. Most of the goods produced are consumed within the UoM, and some are exported to surrounding areas. As for tailoring and home-based food production, some of it is marketed within the UoM through exhibitions, while the rest faces distribution-related challenges. As mentioned in a consultative meeting with relevant stakeholders in the union, this sector also faces challenges related to high production costs and labour expenses.

## Trade

Commercial establishments are present in most municipalities included within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, with the majority being small-sized businesses. The percentage of workers who are engaged in the trade sector in the UoM is 17 per cent of the workforce,

according to information collected by the union (Figure 9). In terms of gender distribution of the workers in the trade sector, 80 per cent of the workers are reportedly males and the remaining 20 per cent are females, distributed within the age group of 45 years old and above.

Commercial activities in the union mainly involve clothing retail, supermarkets, and shops selling medical supplies, household and electrical appliances, and cleaning products. These small retail shops do not fully meet the demands of the local market, often leading residents to make purchases outside of the union. The problems in this sector also include intense competition from foreign goods, lack of price monitoring, the existence of monopolies by relevant state authorities, a decrease in sales due to the customers' low purchasing power, noticeable investment weakness due to the ongoing economic crisis, and instability of the value of the Lebanese Pound against the US Dollar.

## Tourism

The tourism sector is considered one of the important sectors that contribute to driving the economy in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun. The UoM includes various touristic areas. There are several religious sites, including a shrine in the town of Charoun, three churches in the town of Saoufar, three churches in the Bhamdoun region, and two mosques in the town of Shanaya. In Bhamdoun, there is a historical synagogue dating back to 1944, and its structure remains intact despite its abandonment in 1975. All of these sites are characterized by their strong heritage value.

The percentage of workers who are engaged in the tourism sector in the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun is 13 per cent of the workforce, according to information collected from the UoM (Figure 9). The workers in this sector are 25 years and older, evenly distributed by gender.

However, in the last two years, and due to the difficult economic situation in the country, the tourism sector has suffered a decline, including during the summer season, which is the main tourist season of the union, leading to reduced income. Municipal budgets have not allowed for the organization of events and exhibitions. Additionally, there is a lack of financing, business plans, and efficiency

in the available relevant associations, as well as a lack of key factors that could support tourism, such as tourism marketing and public transportation. Currently, efforts are under way to reactivate the tourism sector through organizing exhibitions and festivals in the union and promoting environmental tourism through active associations in the region, with the help of municipalities. The union works on stimulating tourism and engaging expatriates by:

- Encouraging various tourism projects through tax exemptions and reductions for a specific period.
- Establishing a project along the railway line that starts in Aley and passes through Saoufar, such as creating a bike path; installing benches; planting roses, seedlings and trees; and rehabilitating the railway stations.
- Creating a Destination Management Organization (DMO) that diversifies and coordinates economic activities related to tourism in the union. Such activities encompass cultural, artistic, religious and sports events; offering excellent restaurants, hotels and guesthouses; and ensuring a beautiful and clean environment, among others.

## Remittances from abroad

According to data collected from the UoM, approximately 20 per cent of the registered population of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun live outside of Lebanon.

Most expatriates are financially well-off, keen on staying connected with their relatives in the area and providing them with financial support. The largest portion (around 90 per cent) of these remittances help families and relatives in the region cover their expenses and maintain their living standards, while the remaining approximately 10 per cent goes to supporting/funding municipal services due to the inability of the state to afford them in light of the Lebanese currency devaluation. These services include health-care and social assistance, as well as some development and infrastructure projects.

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

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

**“ Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun: an area that protects its rich natural resources and diverse agriculture, that shines with its touristic, cultural, and heritage landmarks, with an active population, starting from its youth to the elderly and that is ready for development and growth. ”**

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 region's assets and available opportunities. According to the results of the process followed during the project within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, 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 harnessed and improved for the better.

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

The below section includes an overview of the identified strategic directions for the available productive sectors within the Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, with a focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors, both of which present opportunities for sound local socioeconomic development. These directions have been identified and proposed based on the analysis of the existing situation of these sectors

presented in the previous section, which relied on information provided from different local stakeholders through a participatory approach.

As for other sectors (such as industry, trade, and crafts and vocations), they will certainly continue to play a role in the socioeconomic development of cities and towns of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun. However, local stakeholders engaged in the project considered that these other sectors can also be developed in a manner that aligns with the vision and directions of the union with regard to agriculture and tourism. The industrial sector, for example, can contribute to enhancing the agriculture and tourism sectors by playing a complementary role. Thus, local stakeholders involved in the project considered it crucial to work on safeguarding the small industries present in the region and developing certain manufacturing crafts through specialized training to enhance competencies and skills. This requires securing alternative and cost-effective sources of electricity, supporting industry owners, protecting local production from competition, and securing markets for both local and international distribution of local products.

To activate the trade sector, local stakeholders participating in the project argued that it is essential to encourage investment in the sector to attract young individuals and discourage their migration. They identified a need to protect small- and medium-sized commercial establishments in the union. Furthermore, they proposed promoting individual online-based trading initiatives; incentivizing youth and women to establish small commercial projects through networking and coordination with organizations working in this context; and training traders in the union on the fundamentals

of sales, purchasing, marketing, feasibility study for their projects, and development of income-generating ventures. They considered such steps as helpful to create and provide employment opportunities for the youth of the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun.

If the union and the relevant municipalities prioritize the development of the tourism and agriculture sectors, it is imperative that other essential social and basic services are also available. These services help retain Lebanese citizens in their towns and villages and attract

other groups to work in the mentioned sectors. If the union intends to attract investments from outside the region, it is essential that basic services like roads, water and electricity are available. Additionally, it is crucial to enhance health-care services in existing clinics by supplying them with medical equipment and medications, in addition to supporting them with a complete emergency response plan. A sustainable plan should also be implemented for solid waste management throughout the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun.



## Agriculture

As shown above in the presentation of the current state of sectors within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, including their available resources and potential opportunities, the agriculture sector represents a significant and real opportunity for the inhabitants of the union in terms of improving their economic situation and increasing employment opportunities for both the youth and families. While many families engage in agriculture as a non-professional practice, considering it as a secondary and additional source of income, certain interventions, programmes and projects can lead to a qualitative leap in this sector. This requires the concerted efforts and capabilities of municipalities, civil society institutions, and the private sector, along with the provision of funding from donor entities, in order to enable the work towards achieving sustainable agricultural development.

According to local stakeholders engaged in the project, the process of developing the agriculture sector requires interventions at the infrastructure level, such as opening and rehabilitating agricultural roads that enable people to access and cultivate their lands. This process also includes the development of dryland and irrigation farming techniques and practices through collaboration with agricultural research centres and schools in the region. Additionally, water is considered as a fundamental element for agricultural development, which necessitates municipalities and other relevant entities to work on protecting groundwater, increasing water reserves, establishing modern irrigation systems, and striving to conserve rainwater. This includes recycling used household water and encouraging farmers to use treated wastewater for irrigation, adopting drip irrigation, creating central rainwater collection ponds, and organizing the distribution of irrigation water through the management of independent water committees.

At the level of human resources, local stakeholders who participated in the project considered it important to activate existing agricultural cooperatives, train farmers, empower them with modern agricultural knowledge and expertise, and enhance agricultural guidance. The activation of existing agricultural cooperatives, such as beekeepers' cooperatives and cattle breeders' cooperatives, could significantly contribute to stimulating and developing agricultural and livestock production. This, along with technical programmes provided by donor organizations and relevant governmental institutions, aims to develop the agricultural workforce, including women and individuals with special needs.

To revitalize agriculture, soil testing and the promotion of alternative crops suitable for climate change – such as kiwi, mango and avocado – were also considered essential. Furthermore, introducing food products tailored to the region's nature and characteristics, while taking into account emerging climate changes, was regarded as crucial. The development of dryland and irrigated crops through the utilization of agricultural research centers in the region and agricultural technical schools was considered important. It was also argued that establishing an agricultural guidance centre can support the agricultural sector. In addition, creating an online platform for collaboration with every farmer, was viewed as beneficial. Other recommendations made by relevant stakeholders included supporting farmers by providing consultations, awareness, loans; supplying them with agricultural medicines and fertilizers; as well as helping in marketing their products. It was also considered beneficial to focus on fish farming through the creation of freshwater and saltwater ponds operating with systems that prevent food waste residue build-up for fish.

Local stakeholders also emphasized the necessity of focusing on animal husbandry by activating veterinary care, training farmers on administering appropriate medications, conducting regular check-ups, and ensuring the well-being of livestock. Additionally, nurturing beekeeping and conducting honey inspections prior to marketing were highlighted as crucial aspects to consider.

Development opportunities for the agriculture sector are available within the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, with the need for all municipalities to work collectively and in a coordinated manner. To embark on this path, it was proposed to establish an agricultural sector committee at the union level, including representatives from municipalities, agricultural cooperatives, civil societies, farmers and the

private sector. The mission of this committee will be to develop a road map for local agricultural development based on multiple and progressive stages, including a set of programmes and interventions targeting agricultural infrastructure and human skill development, all within a reasonable time frame. This committee should also communicate with government, civil and international supporting entities to present the agreed-upon road map and priority projects. It can establish smaller subcommittees to facilitate communication with a broader range of supporting entities.

Local stakeholders also argued that agriculture can play a fundamental role in boosting the tourism sector, focusing on restaurants that can benefit from the region's production of staple and renewable crops.





# 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 for operating wells for irrigation

- Enhancing the work of agricultural cooperatives and activating their role
- Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture and enhancing collaboration
- Involving local development-oriented NGOs in the collaboration process
- Establishing connections with agricultural colleges within universities to facilitate agricultural research initiatives
- Collaborating with civil defence and other relevant authorities to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for fire prevention and control
- Activating municipal and official accountability to halt encroachments on public properties, forests and woodlands

- Training youth and women on agricultural topics and modern techniques
- Guiding youth to reduce migration
- Activating the relationship with expatriates and involving them in financing and marketing projects
- Training residents in food processing and local food production
- Activating agricultural guidance and training
- Preparing and implementing recurring awareness campaigns to encourage residents to engage in agricultural activities
- Developing and implementing advertising and media campaigns to highlight the importance of agricultural products in the union
- Encouraging youth to participate in agricultural cooperatives and enter the job market

Long time to achieve

- Collaborating with ministries and municipalities to establish a sustainable plan for infrastructure maintenance
- Providing clean water for irrigation and marketing sustainable crops that do not require water
- Constructing and maintaining agricultural roads
- Reclamation of vast barren lands
- Establishing modern irrigation systems for agriculture
- Processing the disposal and burning of waste in the lands around the towns

- Working on establishing specialized agricultural and livestock cooperatives
- Establishing relationships with donor organizations to secure funding and resources for the implementation of projects, ensuring successful collaboration and project execution

- Conserving the natural resources in the UoM of Jord El Aala Bhamdoun and investing in them
- Protecting groundwater resources
- Preserving soil by establishing proper waste disposal sites
- Creating reserves to preserve natural resources
- Developing and implementing municipal regulations to conserve resources and natural areas

Infrastructure

Institutional framework

Natural resources

Human resources

## Tourism

The UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun possesses abundant natural, heritage, climatic and human resources, which form the fundamental elements that can be built upon to revitalize the tourism sector in the union. While the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun has the essential elements to activate and enhance the tourism sector, it requires massive efforts and resources in terms of infrastructure and the commitment of official, civil and private local institutions to work together, each according to its capabilities.

One key step identified by local stakeholders involved in the project was the establishment of natural reserves within the town of Ramliyah near the union, but it was halted. It was also considered important to create fire stations in the union for fire prevention.

In addition to preserving natural resources, local stakeholders argued that it is necessary to build local capacities and empower local actors to keep up with the process of revitalizing the tourism sector, which entails training human resources, especially the youth. An important initial step that was identified by local stakeholders was for the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, in collaboration with civil society organizations, to seek funding, not necessarily large in scale, to develop a realistic tourism plan to include environmental tourism in addition to religious tourism based on the available resources mentioned above. The plan should propose a realistic timeframe, considering the existing challenges in terms of infrastructure and institutional framework, as well as the required duration for capacity development. Moreover, the plan must include a fundamental aspect that focuses on formulating appropriate policies and legal frameworks for preserving natural and heritage resources. The plan must include sufficient flexibility to allow for its implementation in multiple stages, based on priorities and the available financial resources for all interventions. It should also take into consideration the economic and financial conditions prevailing in Lebanon.

Local stakeholders engaged in the project argued that while preparing the strategic tourism plan, the UoM of Jord El-Aala–Bhamdoun, in collaboration with the public and private sectors in the union, can initiate some activities and

interventions that can stimulate the tourism sector, such as:

- Establishing a tourism committee that includes representatives from municipalities, the union, civil society and youth associations, and other interested parties, whose task will be to coordinate and communicate with relevant entities in the tourism sector. The committee can also engage with expatriates and seek funding for small projects.
- Identifying and mapping natural, heritage, cultural and historical tourist sites. University graduates proficient in GIS can be enlisted for this purpose.
- Working on promoting the union through media and positioning it on the national tourism map. University students and some commercial institutions can be involved in creating a tourism marketing plan (posters, brochures, advertisements on TV and social media).
- Encouraging municipalities and local associations to establish and maintain walking trails within forests and woodlands.
- Creating guesthouses, especially within homes that have unused rooms.
- Reviving and developing the local cottage industry, as well as the manufacturing of agricultural and food products.
- Activating cultural, recreational and sports activities in the union and organizing annual festivals that attract expatriates to encourage them to invest and support the tourism sector in the union.





# Proposed tourism sector road map



Building a strong relationship with the Ministry of Tourism concerned ministries



Establishing a local committee within the UoM to communicate with stakeholders

## Level of difficulty to implement

- High
- Moderate
- Low

## Budget to implement

- High
- Moderate
- Low

Short time to achieve



Enhancing collaboration between municipalities and the private sector



Striving to develop a tourism plan for the union



Involving local NGOs dedicated to local development in the tourism planning process



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



Training and empowering youth to provide tourism services



Creating walking trails for hiking enthusiasts



Training residents in food processing and local food production



Organizing regular tourist festivals



Preparing and implementing recurrent awareness campaigns to encourage locals to engage in the tourism development process



Creating and executing advertising and media campaigns about touristic sites and tourism activities in the union



Encouraging families to establish guesthouses and rooms to enhance local tourism



Activating relations with expatriates and encouraging them to invest in tourism projects

Maintaining roads leading to landmarks and tourist areas

Relying on solar energy as a source to provide energy for tourist areas and facilities

Medium 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-Aala-Bhamdoun to enhance tourism

Long time to achieve

Ensuring human resources for the protection and preservation of tourist and archaeological sites

## Infrastructure

## Institutional framework

## Natural resources

## Human resources



## 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 road maps 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 road maps 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.