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Strengthening Systems for Education

The Experience of Assigning NORCAP Experts to Jordan's Ministry of Education

NORCAP: Who we are

NORCAP works to improve aid and better protect and empower people affected by crisis and climate change. We do this by providing expertise and solutions to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding partners.

NORCAP improves aid in two complementary ways:

1. We provide targeted expertise to strengthen our partners' response.
2. We collaborate with partners to develop solutions to unmet gaps and challenges.

NORCAP is part of the Norwegian Refugee Council.

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Strengthening Systems for Education

The Experience of Assigning NORCAP Experts to Jordan's Ministry of Education

Jordan's education system serves approximately three million students across thousands of schools and operates in a highly complex context. The country hosts one of the world's largest refugee populations relative to its size – a consequence of successive displacement crises, most significantly the Syrian refugee crisis from 2011 – placing sustained pressure on public services. The education sector must simultaneously deliver quality education to Jordanian and non-Jordanian students, manage scarce resources, and navigate an evolving landscape of national reforms.

The System Strengthening Partnership (SSP) Programme, led by UNESCO and complemented by resources from the Multi-Partner Trust Fund supported by Canada, Italy, Norway, and Switzerland, was established to address these challenges. The programme's purpose is to support the Jordanian Ministry of Education in strengthening its institutional capacity for education planning, coordination, monitoring, and crisis preparedness. The long-term aim is to strengthen the national education system, leading to equitable and inclusive access to quality education and improved learning outcomes for all children and youth in Jordan, in line with UN Sustainable Development Goal 4.

NORCAP's contribution to the SSP, funded by the Norwegian Embassy in Jordan, provides the embedded expert capacity. This is the focus of these case studies. Between 2019 and 2026, a total of ten NORCAP experts were assigned across five technical areas: gender mainstreaming, data and statistics, crisis and risk management (CRM), monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and partnerships and coordination. Each expert was embedded within the Ministry of Education and hosted by UNESCO, working alongside ministry counterparts for extended periods – with assignment lengths ranging from eight months to five years. The tripartite collaboration between NORCAP, UNESCO, and the Ministry of Education positioned the experts as a bridge between international standards and local institutional realities, and represents a compelling model for sustained, high-impact support.

The five case studies that follow examine each technical area in detail: the institutional context the expert entered, the impact achieved in terms of both technical and institutional capacity strengthening, the factors that enabled success, and the challenges encountered. A set of consolidated recommendations, drawn from across all five technical areas, follows. Taken together, they offer a programme-level account of what it takes to strengthen education systems from the inside – and what the NORCAP assignment model can achieve when sustained engagement, institutional demand, and expertise converge.

Overall Impact of the NORCAP Contribution to the SSP Programme

While each technical area produced distinct achievements – documented in the individual case studies below – the programme’s collective impact results from how these contributions reinforced one another and, critically, from the degree to which they have become embedded in the ministry’s own structures and practices.

From Central Functions to Nationwide Systems

A defining feature of the impact of the NORCAP experts has been the extension of institutional capacity from the central ministry to the regional level and to schools themselves. The Gender Focal Point Network now spans all 42 directorates, with over 150 gender-related activities implemented through locally-owned action plans. CRM Liaison Officers operate across all directorates, creating a two-way communication system for crisis preparedness that did not previously exist. M&E Liaison Officers were designated in all 42 field directorates. The data and statistics team cascaded training to field-level staff through a training-of-trainers model. The partnership and coordination function helped establish the institutional architecture through which central priorities are communicated to, and shaped by, the broader education community.

Strengthening Institutional Infrastructure

Across all five areas, the assignments helped move the ministry from ad hoc ways of working to institutionalised systems with documented processes, formal mechanisms, and defined roles. The annual M&E review cycle has continued through multiple rounds of staff turnover, the clearest evidence of institutionalisation. The Policy, Partnership and Coordination Committee now operates with established terms of reference, quarterly meetings, and technical working groups. The CRM Strategy provides a three-year operational roadmap. Gender equality action plans have been extracted from the national plan and are owned by individual directorates. The Statistical Yearbook has been transformed from a static PDF into an interactive dashboard produced independently by the ministry team.

Strengthening the Evidence Base for Decision-Making

The NORCAP experts fundamentally changed the Ministry’s relationship with evidence. The data and statistics expert helped develop a team that now produces interactive dashboards, reports on SDG4 indicators, and which helped resolve a long-standing discrepancy between national and international data. The M&E function institutionalised a comprehensive annual review process that feeds directly into policy dialogue with donors and partners. The coordination function ensured that this evidence base underpinned both the Education Strategic Plans and Jordan’s engagement with the Global Partnership for Education. The Ministry of Education was recognised as the most advanced ministry across government in submitting inputs to the Economic Modernisation Vision – a reflection of the M&E and data systems established by experts.

Integrating the Work of Experts into the Education Strategic Plan 2026–2030

Each technical area successfully integrated its work into the ESP 2026–2030. This ensured both that programme contributions are now carried forward within the ministry’s own planning, and aligned with the ministry’s expanded priorities, including higher education, TVET, and digital transformation, within the new unified ministry structure. Gender is mainstreamed across the ESP. CRM has its own strategic framework within the plan. The M&E framework is being updated for the merged institutional structure. The coordination function managed the ESP development process, ensuring coherence across all technical areas. This integration into the ministry’s primary strategic document represents the experts’ most significant contribution to sustainability.

Recognition and Regional Influence

The programme’s impact has been recognised beyond Jordan. The ministry’s Gender Equality and Strategic Partnerships Division received first place in the Arab Women’s Organisation’s Institutional Excellence Award for Gender Equality in the Education Sector, standing out among 24 institutions across the Arab States. Jordan’s SDG4 benchmarking work was showcased at the Transforming Education Summit in 2022, with the ministry team presented as regional leaders rather than recipients of technical support. The UNESCO Regional Office has repeatedly selected Jordan’s data work as a good example from the Arab region.

Contents

Mainstreaming Gender Across Jordan's Education System	6
Context	7
Impact of the NORCAP Assignment	8
Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment	8
Challenges and Learning	9
Using Data to Drive Evidence-Based Decision-Making	10
Context	11
Impact of the NORCAP Assignment	11
Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment	13
Challenges and Learning	13
Strengthening Crisis Resilience in Jordan's Education System	14
Context	15
Impact of the NORCAP Assignment	15
Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment	16
Challenges and Learning	17
Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Education	18
Context	19
Impact of the NORCAP Assignment	19
Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment	20
Challenges and Learning	21
Coordinating Partners Across Jordan's Education Landscape	22
Context	23
Impact of the NORCAP Assignment	23
Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment	24
Challenges and Learning	25
Recommendations	26



Mainstreaming Gender Across Jordan's Education System



Jordan's Ministry of Education faces a fundamental challenge in mainstreaming gender across its education system – namely, a small Gender Division in the central ministry responsible for reaching 4,700 schools and three million students. In 2019, UNESCO began supporting the ministry to mainstream gender. Two NORCAP gender experts, assigned sequentially as part of the UNESCO SSP programme, helped establish a network of 84 gender focal points across all 42 directorates. They also developed, implemented and evaluated two Gender Equality Action Plans that were localised by 42 decentralised units run by the Gender Focal Point Network, developed an accredited training programme linking gender to career progression, and successfully advocated for the strengthening of the Gender Division within the new ministerial structure.

Context

Gender mainstreaming in Jordan's education sector operates within a cultural context where the concept itself faces significant resistance. When the Ministry of Education established its Gender Division in 2010, staff faced persistent misunderstandings about what gender work entails. Ministry colleagues often equated gender with advocacy around sexual orientation and gender identity, creating resistance that required years of patient relationship-building to overcome.

The Gender Equality and Strategic Partnerships Division operates with just two people responsible for reaching 42 directorates, 4,700 schools, and three million students. Before NORCAP's engagement in 2019, the division's mandate was limited to administrative follow-up on the School and Directorate Development Programme and to reviewing whether gender considerations had been integrated into directorate plans. With UNESCO's support from 2018, the division developed the Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender in Education and the first Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP, 2018–2022). This was followed by the second GEAP+ (2023–2025), which introduced systematic engagement at the decentralised level and more effectively linked the central unit and the wider education system.

Two gender experts were assigned sequentially by NORCAP, each bringing a different approach to distinct phases of the plan. The first expert (2019–2021) supported the review and early implementation of the GEAP, facilitated awareness-raising workshops on gender mainstreaming, and contributed to initial capacity strengthening efforts across the ministry. Progress during this period was significantly constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted in-person engagement from 2020. The second expert was engaged in 2022 and has since spearheaded the institutional strengthening of gender across the educational system.

What makes gender distinctive among the SSP Programme's five technical areas is its cross-cutting nature and political sensitivity. Unlike more technical functions, work on gender requires navigating cultural sensitivities while strengthening coalitions across the ministry. As one ministry official noted, in the beginning, some people thought gender work meant wanting to "destroy the frame of families" or promote values incompatible with Jordanian traditions. Transforming this perception required an approach that went beyond strengthening technical capacity alone.

Jordan's leadership in advancing gender equality in education has been significant during the time of the NORCAP assignments, and has been recognised at the regional level: the Ministry of Education – through its Gender Equality and Strategic Partnerships Division – received in 2024 first place in the Institutional Excellence Award for Gender Equality in the Education Sector from the Arab Women's Organisation – the first time such a prize has been awarded.

Impact of the NORCAP Assignment

KEY RESULTS

- Gender Focal Point Network established across all 42 field directorates (84 focal points).
- Over 150 decentralised gender activities implemented, with directorates securing own funding.
- More than 250 managers trained in gender mainstreaming.
- First accredited gender and leadership training for administrative staff developed and rolled out.
- Gender equality embedded as both a mainstreamed and standalone component in the ESP 2026–2030.
- Documented shifts in staff attitudes and new cross-cutting collaboration with inclusion teams.

Gender Focal Point Network

The signature achievement was establishing a Gender Focal Point Network across all 42 directorates, composed of 84 focal points, each covering approximately 10 schools. By selecting focal points from existing supervisors with regular school contact, activities could reach hundreds of schools without additional budget or staffing. Each directorate developed its own gender equality action plan by selecting three priority activities from a national menu of 47, resulting in over 150 gender-related activities having been implemented since 2023. Critically, decentralised managers have taken ownership of these plans, including securing their own funding – a strong indicator of sustainability. This was made possible by intensive capacity strengthening for more than 250 managers, organised by the Gender Equality and Strategic Partnerships Division with support from the NORCAP gender expert.

Accredited Training Programme

After supporting the development of a 9.5-hour accredited training for principals and supervisors on gender mainstreaming in school leadership (under the School and Directorate Development Programme), a pioneering 25-hour training programme, 'Leading Change: Integrating Equity and Equality into Leadership Skills,' was developed and formally accredited in 2024 in collaboration with the ministry's Education Training Centre. This marks the first time administrative staff (not just teachers) can access certified training linked to career progression. An initial group of 23 staff (11 women and 12 men) participated in the testing phase, followed by a nationwide rollout that reached 131 MoE administrative staff (42% women and 58% men). The training can continue without external support and demonstrates the MoE's political will to embed gender equality in its management.

Changing Attitudes

Beyond structural achievements, the assignments contributed to measurable shifts in how gender is perceived within the ministry. One respondent noted that "the concept of gender equality has become familiar" through sustained engagement. Assessment of the decentralised gender equality action plans revealed that focal points now work closely with inclusion colleagues, demonstrating cross-cutting collaboration that did not exist before. The assessment specifically noted that stakeholders reported changes in attitudes towards and perception of gender among trained staff, and that training helped weaken resistance to integrating gender into education.

Integration into the New Education Sector Plan

When the Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Education came to an end, the NORCAP expert played a pivotal role in ensuring gender remained a central priority and successfully advocated for gender to be embedded as both a mainstreamed and standalone component in the new Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2026–2030. A third Gender Equality Action Plan will be drawn from the ESP, ensuring continued visibility while fully integrating with ministerial strategic planning. The Canadian Embassy noted NORCAP's key role in supporting their gender equality workshop for ESP development, highlighting the expert's function as a bridge between donor priorities and ministry implementation.

Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment

1. **Strong relationships between NORCAP experts and ministry staff.** The NORCAP experts and the ministry counterparts worked as true partners. Ministry staff brought contextual knowledge of Jordan, while the expert brought international experience; together, they innovated in ways neither could have alone. As one ministry respondent described: "I

gave her my experience from Jordan... she gave me her experience from outside Jordan. This combination was very important.”

- 2. Decentralised approach.** In the second phase of NORCAP support, the expert and counterpart agreed that work needed to move from the central ministry to the directorates. This orientation toward decentralised implementation created structures that will endure beyond the programme.
- 3. Culturally appropriate framing.** Rather than imposing external gender frameworks, the approach focused on concrete issues that resonated locally: early marriage, child labour, boys’ academic underperformance, and technical and vocational education for girls. As one respondent explained: “They don’t want their culture to change, but they do want to give each of their children the same rights.”

Challenges and Learning

Sustainability of a small division. The Gender Equality and Strategic Partnerships Division consisted of just two people (now one following the retirement of one person), responsible for a mandate spanning the entire education system. While the focal point network helped to distribute capacity, coordination remains concentrated in an understaffed unit. Ensuring the division’s sustainability requires not only additional staff, but also embedding gender functions into routine ministerial processes so they are not dependent on a small number of individuals.

LEARNING: Sustainability planning must include advocacy for minimum viable staffing. The ministry’s agreement to support the Gender Focal Point Network is a direct outcome of this advocacy. Moving forward, priority should be placed on supporting the network across the country.

Gender is not treated as a priority. Senior ministry leadership frequently deprioritised work on gender, viewing it as secondary to, say, infrastructure. Some leaders blocked the continuation of a standalone gender strategy, insisting on integration-only approaches despite the risk that gender would be “lost” within broader ESP programming.

LEARNING: Integration and standalone visibility are both necessary. The compromise of extracting a Gender Equality Action Plan from the ESP maintains visibility, ensures integration, and has proved an effective advocacy instrument.

Reporting gaps. While top-down implementation from the central to the decentralised levels functioned well, bottom-up reporting and monitoring remain underdeveloped and need support. Communication relied primarily on WhatsApp rather than systematic monitoring channels. Gender monitoring should form part of the ministry’s regular M&E processes, which NORCAP also supports through its M&E expert assignment.

LEARNING: Integrating gender monitoring into the ministry’s existing M&E systems – acknowledging that these are under development across the MoE as a whole – would be more sustainable than creating parallel informal channels. Closer collaboration between the gender and M&E functions within the SSP could help achieve this.

Turnover in the focal point network. As focal points retired, were promoted, or transferred to other directorates, continuity within the network was weakened. The network requires ongoing renewal and training that the under-resourced Gender Division struggles to provide. Encouragingly, several focal points have already demonstrated resilience by proactively informing new managers of the decentralised Gender Equality Action Plans when leadership changes, signalling an emerging culture of continuity within the network.

LEARNING: Networks require continuous maintenance. Annual refresher training and succession planning should be built into the operational model, with budget implications made explicit upfront.

Strengthening cross-expert collaboration. While cross-expert collaboration has been an important part of the programme, there is scope to further develop it. Systematic collaboration on cross-cutting issues, such as gender-responsive M&E or gendered data analysis – acknowledging that some collaboration already takes place, including on data and statistics for results frameworks and annual reporting – represents an opportunity that future implementation could more actively realise.

LEARNING: Cross-expert collaboration is an asset that should be actively supported and facilitated. More regular coordination meetings would help unlock those cross-cutting benefits already anticipated in the programme design.



Using Data to Drive Evidence-Based Decision-Making



When Jordan's Ministry of Education needed to transform its approach to education data – from ad hoc responses to data that would inform strategic, evidence-based decision-making – it lacked the technical skills and analytical tools to do so effectively. Over five years, the NORCAP data and statistics expert (2020–2025) helped strengthen a statistics team that now independently produces interactive dashboards, reports on SDG4 indicators, and has achieved recognition as a regional model for education data management.

Context

Data forms the backbone of effective education planning. Without accurate, timely statistics, ministries cannot identify which schools are overcrowded, where teachers are needed, which regions lack resources, or whether policies are achieving their intended effects. Yet transforming raw data into actionable evidence requires more than collection systems – it requires analytical capacity, standardised methodologies, and the ability to communicate findings to decision-makers.

When the NORCAP expert arrived at Jordan's Ministry of Education in 2020, the statistics team faced a fundamental challenge. The team of five personnel, plus a head of unit, could respond to data requests but lacked the skills to analyse data strategically or produce the kind of reporting that would drive policy decisions. The Statistical Yearbook – the ministry's primary publication on education data and statistics – and other key publications, such as the ESP M&E Report, were produced as static PDFs with no ability to interact with the figures or navigate the data. SDG4 reporting was poorly understood, and the data published by international bodies on Jordan's education system often differed from national figures, creating confusion and credibility concerns.

Critically, coordination between data-handling units was weak. The Queen Rania Centre (QRC) managed the EMIS (Education Management Information System) data, while the statistics team was responsible for analysis and reporting – but the pipeline between collection and analysis was fragmented. As the expert observed: "I prioritised coordination inside the Ministry of Education... I needed to open the pipelines for data to go through."

The data and statistics area of work is foundational – no other function can operate effectively without reliable underlying data. The NORCAP assignment, therefore, had implications far beyond the statistics team itself, fostering multi-stakeholder engagement with other ministries and national entities, while providing the critical evidence base for the Education Strategic Plan.

Impact of the NORCAP Assignment

KEY RESULTS

- Statistics team transformed from basic Excel users to independent data analysts.
- Statistical Yearbook redesigned as an interactive bilingual dashboard, now produced entirely by ministry staff.
- Jordan selected as a regional model for SDG4 reporting and invited to present at the Transforming Education Summit.
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics agreed to accept Jordan's national data for calculating indicators – a policy change with implications beyond Jordan.
- Standardised methodologies and procedural manuals embedded to ensure institutional continuity through the ministry merger.
- Data analysis training cascaded to field directorates for the first time, with most requesting additional sessions.

Technical and Institutional Capacity Strengthening

The NORCAP expert took a graduated approach to skills development, starting with fundamentals and progressing to advanced tools as the team's capabilities evolved. Training began with Excel techniques – pivot tables, data disaggregation, basic statistical analysis – before introducing Power BI for data visualisation and dashboard development, enabling the team to better understand and communicate data. Tableau was introduced for advanced, in-depth analysis, including the exploration of correlations between datasets and AI-assisted data interpretation. The team now uses Power BI daily for routine reporting and analysis.

Beyond individual skills, the assignment strengthened the institutional capacity of the statistics function. Procedural manuals were developed, calculation methodologies were standardised, and unified analytical approaches were embedded into the team's working practices. The harmonisation of statistical definitions and indicators – ensuring consistency with internationally-approved standards – established a foundation that will support institutional continuity regardless of personnel changes. These systems and processes were identified by the ministry as among the most critical to preserve as the Ministry of Education prepares for its merger with the Ministry of Higher Education.

The most visible evidence of this combined technical and institutional growth is the Statistical Yearbook. Previously a static PDF produced primarily by the QRC with limited statistics team involvement, it is now an interactive online dashboard in both Arabic and English, produced independently by the statistics team. The most recent version was completed entirely without NORCAP involvement, demonstrating the sustainability of the capacity strengthening.

SDG4 Reporting

The expert led comprehensive capacity strengthening on SDG4 indicators, developing an SDG4 matrix that helped standardise reporting, with the impact evident in the improvement between Jordan's first and second SDG4 Progress Reports. A dedicated SDG4 team within the ministry now manages this work. The work of the data expert at the ministry has been repeatedly selected by the UNESCO Regional Office as a good example from the Arab region, and Jordan was invited to showcase its SDG4 benchmarking at the Transforming Education Summit in 2022. The ministry team accompanied this presentation to Paris – rising from recipients of technical support to regional leaders. The expert also supported the Ministry of Education in preparing Jordan's voluntary national reports on SDG4 submitted to the United Nations.

Standardising Data and Reporting

A particularly significant achievement was resolving a long-standing discrepancy between national and international data. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) global database reported figures for Jordan that differed from those the ministry published nationally because UIS used UN population estimates, whereas Jordan used national census data. After sustained advocacy led by the ministry with NORCAP expert support, UIS agreed to accept national data for calculating national indicators: a policy change with implications beyond Jordan alone. This shift ensured a "single version of the truth," which enhanced the international credibility of Jordan's ESP, re-established national ownership of the SDG4 monitoring framework, and ensured that international benchmarks are grounded in the same demographic reality used for domestic budgeting and resource allocation.

Strategic Document Contributions

The NORCAP expert contributed to the evidence base underlying major ministerial documents, including the ESP 2018–2025 and its successor ESP 2026–2030, the ESP Mid-Term Review, annual ESP Reports, the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) 2024, the 10-Year School Rationalisation Plan, and the EMIS Policy and Action Plan. This work extended beyond the statistics team to supporting ministry-wide evidence-based planning processes.

Cross-Cutting Integration

The data function naturally intersected with other SSP technical areas. The NORCAP expert supported the Crisis and Risk Management (CRM) and WebGIS departments in effectively using the EMIS database for their respective functions. The expert also worked with the NORCAP gender expert to support gender-disaggregated data analysis. Collaboration with the M&E expert was particularly close, given the inherent connection between data systems and monitoring functions; the statistics team now plays both an administrative and technical support role for the M&E function, strengthening the quality and regularity of ESP monitoring. The expert also advocated for the inclusion of disaggregated education data for vulnerable populations, including refugees and persons with disabilities, in the 2025 national census, and supported coordination between the ministry and the National Centre for Human Rights to mainstream monitoring tools.

Cascading Capacity to the Decentralised Level

Towards the end of the assignment, the statistics team – with NORCAP support – delivered training sessions to education directorates across the country, cascading the data analysis skills acquired at the central level. This marked the first time the department had conducted such training, and its success was reflected in subsequent requests from most directorates for additional sessions. This transfer of knowledge from central to decentralised levels represents an important step in strengthening data capacity across the education system.

Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment

1. Extended assignment duration. Multiple years of continuous engagement enabled relationship-building and the transfer of capacity that shorter assignments cannot achieve. The NORCAP expert worked with three ministers and three heads of the Planning Department, ensuring continuity amid institutional changes. This duration allowed training to progress from basic Excel techniques to advanced dashboard tools.
2. Stable counterpart team. While the head of department changed during the assignment, core statistics team members remained relatively stable – only two of five moved to other departments. This stability, unusual in a ministry context with significant staff turnover, meant that capacity strengthened in one year carried forward to the next.
3. Arabic language and regional expertise. As a fluent Arabic speaker with experience in the region, the NORCAP expert could communicate directly with counterparts, understand government culture, and share relevant regional comparisons. Ministry staff were receptive to learning from international experience.
4. Demand-driven capacity strengthening. Training responded to emerging needs rather than following a predetermined plan. When the ESP Mid-Term Review required extensive data analysis, the NORCAP expert introduced relevant tools. When the team requested more capability to connect databases, advanced analytical techniques were introduced. This responsiveness created buy-in, with one respondent noting that staff “requested more skills or more tools to empower them.”
5. UNESCO’s positioning in the education sector. Being placed under UNESCO, which leads on education and EMIS in Jordan, strategically positioned the NORCAP expert. UNESCO’s relationships and technical mandate created the necessary space for the expert to work with the ministry team.

Challenges and Learning

Late focus on decentralised capacity. Capacity strengthening focused primarily on the central ministry, specifically the statistics team, with directorate-level engagement coming later in the assignment. A kingdom-wide training-of-trainers on EMIS and data analysis was prepared so the central team could cascade training to directorates, but it was delivered towards the end of the assignment period.

LEARNING: Future data and statistics programming should strengthen decentralised capacity from the outset, not as a later-stage activity.

Sustainability beyond advanced tools. The statistics team did not adopt Tableau despite training because it did not meet their operational needs. This is a positive finding – training was calibrated to actual requirements – but it highlights the importance of assessing institutional capacity before introducing sophisticated tools. The team now has strong skills with the tools they actually use (Excel, Power BI), which is more sustainable than partial capabilities on more advanced platforms.

LEARNING: Capacity strengthening should assess what the institution genuinely needs and can sustain, rather than defaulting to the most advanced tools available.

Staff turnover despite relative stability. While the statistics team was more stable than other ministry units, turnover still occurred: the department head left at the end of the assignment, and two of the five team members changed over the period. The training-of-trainers model and comprehensive documentation helped mitigate this, but institutional knowledge remains vulnerable to personnel changes.

LEARNING: Handover documentation should be stored institutionally, with clear ownership and without reliance on any specific individuals. Training materials should be designed for new staff onboarding, not just current team development.



Strengthening Crisis Resilience in Jordan's Education System



When Jordan's Ministry of Education established a new Crisis and Risk Management (CRM) Unit in 2023, it faced a significant challenge: how to strengthen institutional capacity in a specialised area, drawing on existing but un-institutionalised experiences in refugee response and COVID-19, while addressing evolving operational demands. Two NORCAP experts, assigned sequentially, helped transform a nascent one-person unit into a functioning crisis preparedness system reaching all 42 directorates and more than 4,000 schools across the country.

Context

Jordan has longstanding experience in Education in Emergencies (EiE). This includes its response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which brought significant numbers of school-age children into the national education system, and during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this experience had not been formally institutionalised within the Ministry of Education. The establishment of a dedicated Crisis and Risk Management (CRM) Unit in 2023 represented a significant step toward embedding this experience in ministry systems and structures. At the national level, the government has identified a range of high-priority crisis scenarios that require preparedness – including earthquakes and floods, climate risks, disease outbreaks, and regional instability. The National Centre for Security and Crisis Management (NCSCM) drives this agenda across government, creating a whole-of-government mandate. In parallel, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with UNESCO, developed a CRM Strategy and identified the specific risks and crises that the education system may be called on to address.

This top-down pressure created both opportunities and challenges. When the ministry established its CRM Unit in 2023, it signalled institutional commitment rather than mere compliance with donor requirements. However, the unit was initially positioned at a relatively operational level within the ministry hierarchy and operated as a one-person function with a mandate that, in scope, warranted the resources of an entire directorate.

Into this context came NORCAP's contribution: two embedded experts assigned sequentially, each bringing different skills to different phases of the unit's development. The first assignment (January to October 2024) provided administrative and management expertise suited to the establishment phase, covering strategy, operational planning, and institutional foundations. The second (February 2025 to present) brought technical EiE expertise suited to implementation, translating plans into action at the decentralised level. CRM is inherently cross-cutting in nature and requires integration across the entire ministry and coordination with external bodies, including civil defence and the NCSCM.

Impact of the NORCAP Assignment

KEY RESULTS

- CRM Unit built from concept to fully operational system with national reach.
- CRM Liaison Officers established across all 42 directorates and at the school level.
- Three-year CRM operational plan and earthquake contingency plan finalised and approved.
- Safe Path programme prepared training for approximately 12,000 teachers across all governorates.
- Unit proved its worth in a real-world scenario, tracking 1,024 affected schools during severe weather.
- CRM was embedded in the ESP 2026–2030 and integrated into school development plans.

Establishing Foundations

The CRM Strategy and operational plan were developed by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and finalised in May 2023. When the first NORCAP expert was assigned in January 2024, the expert facilitated the finalisation and approval of the CRM operational plan in February 2024, providing a three-year roadmap. The expert also supported the development of an earthquake contingency plan – identified as one of the most complex scenarios due to its cascading impacts – mapping data gaps between what was collected and what emergency response would require. The expert ensured CRM was embedded in the new Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2026–2030. The ministry counterpart noted that this work added global perspectives to which they “weren’t [previously] exposed.”

Strengthening Directorate-Level Systems

The implementation phase translated these foundations into capacity at the decentralised level. The NORCAP expert supported the establishment of CRM Liaison Officers across all 42 directorates and at the school level, creating a functional two-way communication system that had not previously existed. A Communication Standard Operating Procedure was developed to establish clear reporting structures for both emergency response and routine tasks. Rather than creating parallel systems, CRM planning was integrated into existing school development plans, increasing the likelihood of uptake. The Safe Path programme, coordinated with the Civil Defence Directorate, prepared training for approximately 12,000 teachers across all governorates. In parallel, annual school-level risk assessments were conducted. To support this, a dedicated assessment tool was developed and piloted before being implemented nationwide. The resulting data is now analysed and translated into school-level CRM action plans, strengthening preparedness and informed decision-making across the system.

Demonstrating Real-World Functionality

A real-world scenario demonstrated that the system would function as planned: when harsh weather required monitoring school closures, the ministry successfully tracked 1,024 affected schools. Preparations for potential Mpox mitigation were coordinated with the NCSCM. At a recent SSP Steering Committee meeting, the unit head presented the achievements and stated that the progress “could never have happened” without the NORCAP expert’s support.

Institutional Capacity Strengthening

Beyond developing strategies and tools, the NORCAP assignments helped strengthen the institutional foundations of CRM. The establishment of liaison officer networks across all 42 directorates created a permanent coordination structure. Standard operating procedures, assessment tools, and planning frameworks were embedded within ministry processes. The integration of CRM into the ESP 2026–2030 and into school development plans ensured crisis preparedness became part of routine ministerial planning rather than an externally driven add-on.

Leveraging Cross-Expert Collaboration

Cross-expert collaboration also emerged during this phase, with the NORCAP CRM expert working with the M&E expert on green education, receiving support from the partnerships expert on ministry communications, and building on earlier data integration work linking the EMIS and WebGIS systems to CRM needs.

Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment

1. Continuity of assignments. Having a dedicated expert involved from conceptualisation through national rollout ensured coherence, consistency, and institutional memory throughout. This continuity reduced fragmentation and supported sustainable uptake beyond the assignment period.
2. Government ownership and institutional demand. The NCSCM mandate created institutional demand for CRM capacity rather than relying solely on donor-imposed priorities – a meaningful distinction that determined the quality of counterpart engagement. The unit head’s dedication – managing ministry-wide CRM responsibilities as a one-person operation – ensured the NORCAP experts’ contributions were welcomed. This ownership also generated political will for integration across the ministry, enabling CRM to be embedded in the ESP 2026–2030 rather than remaining an add-on to existing structures.
3. Arabic language capability. Both experts’ fluency in Arabic was decisive. It allowed direct engagement with ministry counterparts without the distancing effect of translation, enabled a more nuanced understanding of institutional culture, and built the trust necessary for sensitive CRM work. For implementation at the decentralised level – coordinating with the NCSCM, Civil Defence Directorate, and 42 directorates – language fluency was not a desirable attribute but an operational necessity. Feedback consistently indicated that the depth of relationships formed and the speed at which collaboration developed would not have been possible without it.

4. Bridging global standards and local practice. The NORCAP experts served as a practical bridge between international best practice and the ministry's operational realities. This included translating global frameworks and experience from comparable contexts into actionable, context-appropriate tools and procedures within Jordan's education system. The same bridging function operated between institutional cultures: when the gap between the two expert assignments left no mediating presence, both communication and momentum between UNESCO and the ministry slowed significantly – underscoring how central the experts were to the programme's overall functioning.
5. Evidence-based and systems-focused design. The assignments emphasised data-driven decision-making from the outset. Rather than producing a generic CRM framework, the team mapped existing data against emergency response needs, identified gaps, and strengthened systems to close them. The development, piloting, and national rollout of school-level risk assessment tools exemplifies this approach: data collection was designed for action, with results feeding directly into school-level CRM action plans. Integrating CRM planning into existing school development plans – rather than creating parallel systems – similarly reflected a systems mindset that strengthened both coherence and the likelihood of sustained use.
6. Capacity strengthening through collaboration. Rather than a stand-alone advisory role, the assignment prioritised hands-on accompaniment, mentoring, and joint problem-solving. This enabled staff to apply EiE and CRM concepts over time – a form of capacity transfer less visible than training but probably more durable. This collaborative approach extended across technical areas: coordination with the M&E, partnerships, and data experts generated synergies that none of the individual assignments could have achieved alone, demonstrating the compounding value of a coherent, multi-expert programme.

Challenges and Learning

Supporting the assignment. CRM and education in emergencies require specialised technical expertise. Respondents noted that ensuring NORCAP experts in this area have access to regular technical guidance and peer networks – drawing on NORCAP's broader education-in-emergencies knowledge and global communities of practice – would strengthen the quality of support provided.

LEARNING For specialised technical areas, NORCAP should consider how best to provide ongoing technical backstopping to assigned experts, complementing the support provided by the host agency.

Phase-appropriate support as systems mature. The initial NORCAP support was appropriately focused on technical assistance embedded within the CRM Unit. However, as the unit became established and its operational systems took shape, the nature of the support required began to shift. Sustaining momentum and deepening institutional impact increasingly called for engagement at more senior levels of the ministry – moving beyond the unit itself to influence cross-departmental coordination and strategic decision-making. Without this shift, there is a risk that the CRM function remains operationally effective but structurally constrained, unable to fulfil its broader coordination mandate across directorates such as education, protection, infrastructure, and greening.

LEARNING: As CRM systems mature, the focus of support should gradually shift from primarily technical assistance embedded within the CRM Unit toward stronger engagement at more senior levels of the ministry, enabling the CRM function to play a broader coordination role.

Navigating the tripartite structure. As with other SSP technical areas, ambiguity over the expert's primary accountability – to the ministry, UNESCO, or NORCAP – at times affected what the expert could advocate for and how competing priorities were navigated. This structural challenge is common across the programme and not specific to CRM.

LEARNING: Written agreements should explicitly define the primary accountability relationship and protocols for when ministry and host agency priorities conflict.

Limited operational budget. The NORCAP expert did not have access to a budget sufficient to implement CRM activities at the decentralised level, creating a dependency on UNESCO approval for basic activities such as workshops.

LEARNING: Where possible, expert assignments should be accompanied by modest operational budgets for expert-directed activities, particularly for implementation-focused roles.



Strengthening Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Education



When Jordan's Ministry of Education needed to transform its monitoring and evaluation function from ad hoc data collection to evidence-based decision-making, three NORCAP experts assigned sequentially helped establish and strengthen the systems, skills, and culture required. The first expert focused on immediate reporting requirements. The second established frameworks, tools, and institutional mechanisms. While the third strengthened technical capacity after staff turnover and is now developing an updated framework in preparation for the planned merger of the ministries of Education and Higher Education.

Context

Jordan's Ministry of Education faces a challenge common to many government institutions: abundant data collection but limited capacity to transform that data into actionable evidence for decision-making. Before NORCAP engagement, the ministry lacked a unified methodology for analysing and reporting data. Monthly and quarterly reports contained inconsistencies and errors. Most critically, there was no shared understanding across the ministry of the distinction between outputs, outcomes, and impact. The digital monitoring system and the use of OpenEMIS (Education Management Information System) for M&E purposes were developed during the NORCAP expert assignments.

The M&E Division sits within the Planning Department, giving it a coordination mandate across the ministry's 22 departments. However, the division was chronically understaffed – at times consisting of just a single person. This constraint would prove significant: M&E work requires sustained engagement across the entire ministry, yet the division lacked the personnel to maintain that engagement independently.

Into this context came NORCAP's contribution: M&E experts assigned sequentially, each facing different institutional circumstances. The first (May to October 2021) focused primarily on the ESP Mid-Term Review. The second (May 2022 to July 2023) arrived to find an M&E function requiring establishment and systematisation. The third (September 2024 to present) found that much of the capacity strengthened in the M&E Division had been lost due to staff turnover, though the broader awareness of M&E's importance across the ministry remained, requiring a rebuild. All three experts brought extensive M&E experience from humanitarian and development contexts. M&E being a core UNESCO competency meant that the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and other UNESCO institutes could provide complementary technical support.

Impact of the NORCAP Assignment

KEY RESULTS

- M&E framework established with indicator reference sheets, Standard Operating Procedures, and digital monitoring via OpenEMIS.
- M&E Liaison Officers designated across all 42 directorates.
- Annual M&E review cycle institutionalised, with reports published consistently since 2020/2021.
- Corrected and rebuilt the annual report after significant data errors, restoring donor confidence.
- Centralised dashboards created across 22 departments, enabling an evidence-based resource allocation.
- Ministry of Education recognised as one of the most advanced across government in submitting Economic Modernisation Vision inputs.

Establishing the M&E Framework and Digital Systems

During the first phase, the NORCAP expert led development of the ministry's M&E framework, which extended beyond indicators to encompass outcomes and outputs across the Education Strategic Plan (ESP). This work laid the structural foundation for evidence-based planning. Indicator reference sheets were produced for each indicator, detailing methodology for data collection and reporting. Alongside this, the expert coordinated the development of guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the OpenEMIS Monitoring Tool, giving ministry staff clear processes for its use. An M&E Committee was established, and M&E focal points were selected across departments; M&E Liaison Officers were designated in all 42 directorates, creating the structural apparatus required for ministry-wide monitoring.

A digital monitoring system was designed and launched in collaboration with the service provider, replacing ad hoc approaches with structured processes. The system was tested, staff trained, data collected, and the ministry produced its first digitally-derived annual report. Capacity strengthening in indicator design, reporting, and use of the OpenEMIS Monitoring Tool was also delivered, though uptake was constrained by limited time. The expert also worked to ensure that M&E frameworks were inclusive, advocating for the disaggregation of data by refugee status, disability, and other markers of vulnerability – laying the groundwork for more equitable monitoring, strengthening refugee inclusion, and supporting inclusive access across the education system. The revised framework laid the foundation for the work that followed on the Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV): feedback indicated that the Ministry of Education became one of the most advanced ministries across government in submitting the required EMV inputs – a recognition of the quality of the M&E systems established.

Rebuilding Capacity After Staff Turnover

When the second NORCAP expert arrived in September 2024, the mechanisms established during the first assignment remained functional across the ministry, while the M&E Division itself had lost institutional memory. The previous head of unit had departed, and the remaining staff lacked sound M&E experience. A serious problem emerged almost immediately: the annual report published shortly after the expert's arrival contained significant errors in baseline data, targets, and enrolment indicators, traced to data entry issues. Donors were concerned. Over four months, the expert worked with the newly appointed head of division to rebuild: engaging all 22 ministry departments, recollecting and reanalysing data, reconstructing missing indicator reference sheets, and producing a corrected report by January. The current MoE counterpart, who joined the M&E Division at the same time as the second NORCAP expert, credits the expert with teaching the fundamentals of M&E practice, noting that the correction effort was overwhelmingly the expert's contribution.

Institutionalising Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Perhaps the most significant and enduring impact of the NORCAP assignment is the institutionalisation of a comprehensive annual M&E review process. Technical Working Groups now meet regularly across all 22 departments to analyse evidence from multiple sources, examine emerging trends in needs and performance, identify challenges, formulate recommendations, and inform operational planning and resource allocation. Findings are consolidated in the Annual M&E Report, which is discussed with national stakeholders, development partners, and donors at Joint Annual Review Meetings (JARMs). Joint recommendations are drafted and consolidated into an aide mémoire, which is publicly shared after each JARM. This full cycle – from data collection through departmental review to public accountability – was established during the first assignment and has proved durable: reports have been published for 2020/2021, 2022/2023, and 2023/2024, with the 2024/2025 report at an advanced stage of drafting at the time of writing.

The process has continued functioning after staff and expert departures. The NORCAP expert also created centralised dashboards to consolidate data from across the ministry's 22 departments, providing unified visibility for the first time and enabling resource allocation decisions based on performance and need rather than donor pressure. With the planned merger of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, and the new Education Strategic Plan (2026–2030), the current NORCAP expert is now developing an updated M&E framework for the anticipated new institutional structure and planning.

Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment

1. Mechanisms outlasted individuals. The M&E processes established during the first assignment remained in place after the original head of unit departed. Other departments knew their roles in the annual reporting cycle, even when the M&E Division's own capacity was depleted. The JARM process continued through successive rounds of personnel change – demonstrating that M&E practice has been embedded institutionally.
2. Cross-expert collaboration. All three NORCAP M&E experts worked closely with the data and statistics expert, given the inherent connection between their functions. Cross-expert collaboration was facilitated by regular engagement. Each expert also championed local ownership, ensuring that the priorities and perspectives of ministry staff remained at

the heart of their work. Collaboration with the partnerships and coordination expert – placed under the Development Coordination Unit (DCU) – was equally important: M&E findings were regularly shared and discussed with development partners, making them essential to policy dialogue. This cross-expert collaboration strengthened joint efforts across the ministry's departments.

3. Physical embedding in the ministry. The current NORCAP expert sits at a desk directly behind the head of division, enabling continuous mentoring and real-time support rather than periodic advisory input. This co-location has significantly accelerated both capacity transfer and problem-solving.
4. Flexibility to respond to changed circumstances. When staff turnover necessitated the second expert shifting from strategic advisory work to hands-on capacity strengthening, the assignment model accommodated this pivot. NORCAP's ability to respond to what the institution actually needed, rather than what had originally been planned, proved essential.
5. UNESCO's complementary expertise. The combination of NORCAP embedded expertise and UNESCO strategic support – including through UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning – provided genuinely complementary value, with UNESCO well placed to support the broader strategic dimensions of M&E, while the NORCAP expert focused on operational embedding.

Challenges and Learning

Single-person dependency. The M&E Division's minimal staffing meant all capacity was concentrated in a single person. When that person departed, institutional knowledge left with them, despite documented systems being in place. This risk was compounded where capacity strengthening focused primarily on the immediate counterpart rather than the broader team.

LEARNING: Sustainability requires a minimum team size. Experts should advocate for additional personnel and deliberately target capacity strengthening beyond the immediate counterpart. Systems strengthening through development of policies and Standard Operating Procedures, structured handover and consolidated learning processes are equally essential to ensure knowledge transfer is not dependent on individual continuity.

Gap between assignments. The ten-month gap between the first and second NORCAP expert contributed to capacity loss. No direct handover occurred between the two substantive assignments. This challenge was experienced across multiple SSP technical areas.

LEARNING: Continuity matters for system-strengthening. Gaps between experts should be minimised, and handover documentation should be supplemented with direct conversation where possible.

Structural positioning of the M&E function. Placing the NORCAP M&E expert at the operational level within the M&E unit, rather than at a more senior level within the Planning Department, at times limited access to strategic conversations and cross-departmental engagement. For a function with a mandate to coordinate across 22 departments, organisational positioning matters. Beyond coordination, once the M&E Division is adequately staffed and functioning, the challenge shifts to enabling senior decision-makers to actually use the evidence it produces. Decision-makers at the leadership level need to be equipped to be consumers of M&E outputs if the investment in systems is to drive real change in planning and resource allocation.

LEARNING: For cross-cutting functions such as M&E that must engage all departments, expert placement at a more senior organisational level may be more effective than embedding within the specific technical unit. Future programming should also explicitly address capacity strengthening for senior decision-makers as users of evidence.



Coordinating Partners Across Jordan's Education Landscape



When Jordan's Ministry of Education set out to transform how it coordinated with dozens of development partners and donors, it lacked the structures, systems, and capacity to do so effectively. Over four years, two NORCAP partnership and coordination experts, assigned sequentially, helped establish the institutional architecture that now enables the ministry to plan strategically, coordinate donors, and speak with one voice to the international community.

Context

Jordan's education sector operates with significant international involvement: multiple UN agencies, bilateral donors, and development partners each supporting different aspects of education delivery, refugee integration, and system strengthening. Before the SSP programme, this multiplicity created fragmentation. The coordination function at the ministry was stretched, with too many donors, too many modalities, and insufficient capacity to bring coherence to the system.

The Development Coordination Unit (DCU) sits directly under the minister, giving it a unique position within the ministry's structure. While the other NORCAP expert placements are all housed within divisions under the Planning Department, the partnership and coordination role operates at the ministry's nerve centre, where strategic decisions are made and donor relationships managed. The NORCAP expert reports to the Head of the DCU, a position that itself carries considerably more access to decision-making than the counterparts of other NORCAP experts.

This positioning created both opportunity and complexity. Two NORCAP experts were assigned sequentially, each bringing different strengths to distinct phases. The first (2021–2024) brought extensive experience in coordination and humanitarian affairs; the second (2025–present) brought deep familiarity with Jordan's education coordination mechanisms from prior roles in the sector.

What makes partnership and coordination distinctive among the SSP's technical areas is its macro-level function. The coordination role provides the overarching structure within which the other technical areas – gender, M&E, data, and crisis management – operate and connect. This architectural role meant the NORCAP expert worked across all ministry functions and served as the connective tissue between Jordan's national priorities and international support.

Impact of the NORCAP Assignment

KEY RESULTS

- The Policy, Partnership and Coordination Committee transformed into a functioning coordination platform with technical working groups and regular quarterly meetings.
- Coordinated stakeholder consultations and workshops for the ESP 2026–2030 development.
- Supported Jordan's engagement with the Global Partnership for Education, contributing to securing a System Capacity Grant.
- Led the education component of Jordan's Economic Modernisation Vision across multiple ministries.
- DCU staff shadowing the expert across all coordination functions, ensuring the transfer of capacity.
- Coordination structures adapted to support the upcoming ministry merger.

Institutionalised Coordination Mechanisms

The Policy, Partnership and Coordination Committee (PPCC) – a forum that regularly brings the ministry, partners, and donors together – was established with UNESCO support under the SSP before the NORCAP expert position was created. Its operationalisation, however, took off with NORCAP support. The NORCAP expert reviewed and updated the terms of reference, created technical working groups across different education domains - serving as technical advisor for the piloting of the first four groups, and established quarterly meetings that continue to this day. Structured capacity transfer was also undertaken with DCU colleagues: different staff following up on different PPCC components, with ministry personnel shadowing the expert in meetings and supporting all PPCC-related work. One embassy noted “tangible results” from bringing stakeholders together and following up on action points.

Education Strategic Plan Development

The coordination role was central to the development of the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2026–2030. The NORCAP expert coordinated workshops, managed stakeholder consultations, ensured all relevant parties were invited to discussions, and tracked data, indicators, and action points throughout the process. The ESP serves three critical functions: positioning Jordan within global education frameworks and the SDGs, providing a unified message to donors about priorities to avoid duplication, and keeping the ministry internally focused on agreed objectives. This work enabled other SSP experts to embed their technical areas into an overarching strategic framework.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Engagement

The NORCAP expert significantly contributed towards Jordan’s engagement with the Global Partnership for Education, coordinating consultant interviews, arranging workshops between the ministry and partners, and facilitating agreement on priorities for the next five years of GPE funding. UNESCO Jordan’s Chief of Education credited the NORCAP expert’s presence with helping the ministry better understand and articulate its needs so that UNESCO could tailor its proposal accordingly, ultimately securing a System Capacity Grant, noting that the ministry “trusts” and “sees firsthand the impact of having instant support on the system.”

Economic Modernisation Vision

The NORCAP expert established and led the education component of Jordan’s Economic Modernisation Vision (EMV) – a 10-year national strategy launched in 2022. Although this work was not initially within the agreed programme priorities, it proved to be a central government priority, extending the expert’s support beyond the Ministry of Education to the Ministries of Higher Education and Planning. This strategic-level contribution demonstrated how embedded expertise can align ministry work with national priorities when the flexibility exists to respond to what matters most.

Navigating National Reforms and Shifting Coordination Demands

Both experts navigated significant national reforms during their assignments. Jordan is currently merging the Ministry of Education with the Ministry of Higher Education, reducing the number of governorate-level directorates from 42 to 16, and implementing sweeping public-sector reforms. At the same time, the changing geopolitical landscape – including the evolving situation of Syrian refugees, developments in Gaza and the wider Middle East, and shifting donor priorities – has created new coordination demands. The NORCAP expert’s role in helping the ministry adapt its coordination structures and strategic planning to this shifting context has been particularly valuable, ensuring partner relationships are maintained through a period of significant institutional change.

Factors Supporting the Success of the Assignment

1. Strategic positioning within the ministry. The NORCAP experts’ placement within the DCU, reporting to the Head of the DCU, positioned them closer to senior decision-making than any other SSP expert placement. This proximity enabled influence on strategic and policy matters that would not have been possible from deeper within the ministry hierarchy.
2. Contextual knowledge and sector experience. Both NORCAP experts brought relevant prior experience – in coordination, humanitarian affairs, and Jordan’s education sector. For the second assignment in particular, prior familiarity with Jordan’s education coordination mechanisms and existing relationships with stakeholders significantly reduced transition friction. This underlines the value, across all SSP technical areas, of recruiting experts with contextual knowledge alongside technical qualifications.
3. Arabic language and regional expertise. Both experts were Arabic speakers with regional experience. The ability to communicate directly in Arabic, understand government culture, and navigate ministry dynamics contributed significantly to the relationships on which coordination work depends. Sustained trust, however, is built through engagement and competence rather than language alone.

4. The tripartite reporting structure. Despite some of the challenges the tripartite arrangement created (see below), the institutional backing that UNESCO provided was a genuine asset at the strategic level. The combination of UNESCO's institutional weight with NORCAP's operational flexibility enabled the expert to engage credibly with both the ministry and the international community.
5. Cross-expert collaboration. The coordination role's macro-level function created natural points of integration with other SSP experts. The gender workshop for ESP development was supported jointly by the coordination and gender experts. When experts shared office space and met regularly, they could identify overlap, support each other's work, and ensure technical interventions were aligned with ministry priorities. The coordinator's position also means they are well placed to serve as a focal point within the expert group.

Challenges and Learning

Navigating competing reporting structures. As with other SSP technical areas, the tripartite arrangement between NORCAP, UNESCO, and the ministry created some ambiguity over the expert's primary accountability. This tension was particularly acute in the coordination role, given its strategic positioning and exposure to sensitive information. Different stakeholders held different expectations of whose priorities the expert should serve, which at times constrained what the expert could advocate for.

LEARNING: Written agreements should explicitly define the primary accountability relationship and establish clear protocols for when ministry and host agency priorities conflict. Clarity on roles from the start of each assignment is essential.

Ministry coordination capacity and sustainability. Despite the progress made, the ministry's coordination capacity remains stretched: sustaining coordination at the required level will remain challenging without continued support. The PPCC and related structures provide the institutional foundation for longer-term sustainability, and the capacity-transfer work undertaken with DCU colleagues – with different staff taking on different PPCC components – was a meaningful step in that direction. The significant structural changes currently underway in the ministry – the merger, directorate restructuring, and wider public-sector reforms – make this period particularly demanding for coordination capacity.

LEARNING: Expert assignments in coordination roles should include explicit capacity-transfer plans from the outset – not as an end-of-assignment activity. Structured engagement with ministry counterparts throughout the assignment strengthens the ownership that sustainability requires.

Operational flexibility. Experts working at the strategic level need the flexibility to respond to evolving ministry priorities. When the NORCAP expert could take initiative aligned with ministry priorities – as with the Economic Modernisation Vision – the impact was significant. Ensuring that programme structures enable this responsiveness, with clear agreement from all parties on the expert's mandate, is important for maintaining credibility with ministry counterparts.

LEARNING: Programme structures should enable rather than constrain the expert's ability to respond to evolving ministry priorities, particularly at the strategic level. Clear agreement on the expert's mandate and scope of flexibility should be established at the outset of each assignment.

Recommendations

1. **Clarify the tripartite relationship in writing at the start of each assignment.** Across all five technical areas, experts identified ambiguity in the NORCAP–UNESCO–ministry arrangement as a recurring challenge. Written agreements should explicitly define the primary accountability relationship, establish protocols for when ministry and host agency priorities conflict, and set out the expert’s mandate and scope of flexibility. This clarity should be established before the assignment begins, not left to the expert to negotiate.
2. **Institutionalise handover and ensure continuity between assignments.** Gaps between expert assignments – ranging from four to ten months across the programme – led to loss of momentum and institutional knowledge. Structured handover periods with overlap should be standard wherever possible. Documentation alone is insufficient: on-the-ground orientation, mentoring, and relational context are equally important. For foundational functions, multi-year commitments and carefully managed transitions should be prioritised.
3. **Strengthen decentralised capacity from the outset.** Some experts found engagement at the directorate and school level was considered late in the assignment. Future programming should build decentralised capacity transfer into work plans from inception, using training-of-trainers approaches to cascade skills from the central ministry to directorates. This should be factored into programme design, acknowledging that annual funding cycles can constrain the pace of decentralisation.
4. **Distribute capacity strengthening beyond the immediate counterpart.** Single-person dependency proved a significant vulnerability: when a counterpart departed, institutional knowledge left with them despite documented systems. Experts should deliberately engage liaison officers, focal points, and staff across departments, creating distributed capacity that survives personnel changes. Formalised training packages for onboarding new ministry staff would reduce reliance on experts for foundational skills transfer.
5. **Design cross-expert collaboration into the programme structure.** The SSP’s five technical areas are inherently interconnected: gender-disaggregated data, gender-responsive M&E, data-driven crisis management, and coordination that aligns all functions with ministry priorities. Future programming should mandate regular coordination among experts, such as shared planning sessions, integrated work plans, joint reporting, rather than leaving collaboration to individual initiative.
6. **Position experts at the appropriate organisational level for their function.** Cross-cutting functions such as M&E, coordination, and CRM require engagement across the entire ministry. Experts in these roles should, where possible, be positioned at a sufficiently senior level to access strategic conversations and cross-departmental processes. Where units are newly established or understaffed, early advocacy for adequate staffing and institutional authority should be part of the expert’s mandate.
7. **Prioritise contextual knowledge and sector experience in recruitment.** While Arabic language fluency was consistently identified as desirable, it was not always seen as essential. For all technical areas, recruiting experts with existing knowledge of the sector and relevant regional experience should carry significant weight alongside technical qualifications and language competence.
8. **Leverage host agency expertise and provide NORCAP technical backstopping where needed.** Where the host agency has core competencies that complement the NORCAP expert – as with UNESCO’s role in M&E and education planning – this complementarity should be actively leveraged. Equally, where specialised technical areas fall outside the host agency’s core mandate – as with Education in Emergencies – NORCAP should provide ongoing technical guidance and peer support, drawing on its wider networks and communities of practice.
9. **Plan for phase-appropriate and evolving support. As institutional systems mature, the nature of support required changes.** Expert assignments should be periodically reviewed and adjusted to reflect the programme phase and evolving needs – shifting, for example, from technical establishment to senior-level engagement, from analytical capacity to systems expertise, or from technical embedding to institutional transition support. Programme structures should enable experts to respond flexibly to ministry priorities, particularly at the strategic level.
10. **Accompany expert assignments with modest operational budgets.** Several experts, particularly those in implementation-focused roles, lacked clear budget lines for activities at the decentralised level – creating dependency on host agency approvals for routine activities such as workshops and training. Where possible, expert assignments should be accompanied by modest, expert-directed operational budgets to enable responsive implementation.
11. **Demonstrate value for money and scalability through evidence of sustained institutional change.** Future programming should systematically document how embedded, long-term expertise contributes to outcomes that short-term consultancy inputs cannot achieve, including lasting capacity transfer, system ownership, and institutional change. This evidence base should be used to articulate the model’s value for money and to make the case for replication, both within other units of the merged ministry and in comparable country contexts with similar capacity-strengthening needs.



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