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FEATURE STORY

BORDERS AREN'T BARRIERS, THEY'RE OPPORTUNITIES: LESSONS FROM JORDAN'S CUSTOMS REFORMS

Moving goods across Jordan's borders once involved extensive procedures and manual documentation. Today that image is fading fast and, in its place, stands a leaner, faster, and smarter customs system that's transforming Jordan into a regional trade hub.

Building this transformation is the Jordan Customs Department (JCD), an agency that is reinventing itself. With support from the Jordan Inclusive Growth and Economic Opportunities Multi Donor Trust Fund (Jordan Growth MDTF), co-chaired by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the World Bank Group (WBG), Jordan is building a new kind of border: digital, data driven, and user-centered. It's a journey of transformation from queues to clicks, from control to collaboration, and from paperwork to performance.



International trade plays a significant role in economic development, and for Jordan in specific, where its share to GDP exceeds 75%, the multiplier effect of trade facilitation reforms is substantial and has direct impact on individuals, businesses, and government efficiency. It is an essential part of Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision, and that is why the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation is keen to provide the needed support to implement trade related reforms. As co-chair of the MDTF, we will make sure to continue working with the Customs Department and other border control agencies to deliver structural reforms based on international best practices.

- Omar Fanek, Director of the Reform Secretariat at MoPIC

Customs reform in Jordan isn't about new slogans but about changing how trade actually works. The initial change was the National Single Window (NSW), a digital platform that allows traders and logistics companies to submit all their paperwork electronically through one portal. This replaced the exhausting process of moving from agency to agency. Instead, traders upload, click, and move their inputs. The result? Faster clearance, less duplication, and far more predictability, especially at major border points, where waiting times have been cut in half.

The system, now evolving into NSW 2.0, integrates nine border agencies and includes a licensing hub that links permits and approvals from across government.



Through the support of the Jordan Growth MDTF, several recommendations upon different studies and projects have been implemented in recent years, helping us move closer to achieving our national goals, including facilitating trade, encouraging investment, and modernizing risk management systems to serve both Customs and other regulatory agencies. This marks a transformative phase in our institutional and cultural journey, as we embrace advanced technology, artificial intelligence, and data science to build a more efficient, transparent, and partnership-driven customs environment.

- Lt. Gen. Ahmad Al Akalik, Director General of the Jordan Customs Department

Jordan Customs didn't stop at digitalization. The agency began rethinking how inspections work altogether. Through the Post Clearance Audit (PCA) Program, customs officers can now verify trade transactions after goods are released, focusing on high-risk shipments instead of checking every container crossing the border.

Over 60 officers have been trained to manage PCA operations, supported by new data tools that analyze patterns and flag potential risks. The impact has been significant: a 55% increase in green lane shipments, meaning faster clearance for compliant companies.

These reforms were enshrined in the 2024 Customs Law, which also introduced pre-arrival processing and laid the legal foundation for unified border management.

Jordan's reform journey is built upon trust between government, businesses, and citizens. For example the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program, often called the Golden List, recognizes companies that consistently comply with customs requirements providing them with faster clearance, fewer inspections, and priority treatment in return resulting in a trust based expedited clearances that are mutually beneficial

The AEO program now operates within Jordan's ASYCUDA World platform, creating a dedicated digital environment for verified traders. 134 companies are currently on the list, forming a trusted network that moves goods faster while maintaining accountability.

This shift from enforcement to partnership has changed how investors' view customs. Instead of being a bottleneck, JCD has become a facilitator, a quiet enabler of competitiveness and growth for Jordan.

Processes are now clearer and faster, reducing both time and storage costs... Today our relationship with Customs is built on trust and cooperation. It truly feels like a partnership and a win-win situation for all, including the citizens of Jordan.

- Mohamood Barqawi, Financial Manager at Abu Tawileh Group



The Time Release Study Plus (TRS+), conducted with support of the Jordan Growth MDTF, became a game changer for evidence-based reform. The study tracked how long goods took to move through Jordan's borders, identifying bottlenecks and practical fixes. When the study revealed delays at Al Omari point, the JCD didn't just file a report. It addressed recommendations, restructuring operations upgrading infrastructure, reassigning staff, and extending operating hours. The TRS+ has since become a national benchmark for measuring progress, adopted as an indicator under Jordan's Economic Modernization Vision.

Reform isn't just about systems, it's about people who use them. When a Trade Facilitation and Gender Study, supported through the Jordan Growth MDTF, revealed that women represent only 5% of active players in the logistics and customs ecosystem, JCD began integrating gender into its training and research plans, ensuring that modernization doesn't leave anyone behind. The Directorate of Strategic Studies' 2026 agenda now prioritizes gender and trade. It turned out that barriers to women participation were not legal but informational as many women-led firms simply lacked access to the knowledge and networks needed to trade. **Identifying and now addressing these knowledge and network gaps carries a big message for all reform initiatives: efficiency must also be inclusive.**

JCD's next step is the Integrated Risk Management System (IRMS), a digital intelligence engine designed to facilitate data analysis, automate targeting, and prevent revenue leakage. Once in place, it will give customs officers real-time insight into which shipments to inspect, turning border control into science.

With the support of the Jordan Growth MDTF and our partners, we are redefining how customs operate, moving from routine control to strategic facilitation. We are witnessing a real transformation in the customs culture, where partnership, trust, and innovation guide our work. With clear laws, transparent practices, and constructive collaboration with the business community we are building the foundation of this transformation, ensuring faster clearance, stronger compliance, and greater investor confidence. We aspire for Jordan Customs to be a supportive and attractive environment for investment, one that reflects our country's potential as a regional hub for trade and logistics.

- Lt. Gen. Ahmad Al Akalik, Director General of the Jordan Customs Department

The IRMS reflects a bigger concept of customs management, as **smart trade is not just about moving goods, it's about moving information faster than cargo.** Jordan's customs reforms form an architecture of digital systems, legal reforms, human development, training, and policy shifts all connected by one vision: a border that works for people. The most efficient borders are not those with the tightest restrictions, rather the most trusted.

Improvements in Jordan Customs are part of a bigger vision to achieve inclusive growth and economic opportunities for all in accordance with the Economic Modernization Vision's drivers of economic growth, quality of life, and sustainability. This vision is supported by reforms, prioritized through the Reform Matrix, and coordinated by the Reform Secretariat at MoPIC.

As we move into Reform Matrix 2.0, the focus remains on deepening digital integration, advancing green and resilient trade systems, and expanding opportunities for youth and women. What we witness with JCD is proof that reform, when led by national institutions and backed by strong partnerships, delivers real and lasting impact.

Mohamed Abdulkader, Jordan Growth MDTF Program Manager and Senior Private Sector Specialist, World Bank