



# Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020



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# FOREWORD



The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 (ASDR 2020) offers a situation analysis of sustainable development in the Arab region and the state of implementation of 17 SDGs with all their interlinkages. It quantitatively and qualitatively analyses where the region stands in relation to the global targets and identifies the structural barriers to transformative change. It sheds light on the categories of countries and the people that are at risk of being left behind. And it offers strategic interventions needed to dismantle barriers to achieving the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region.

This is an ambitious report but also a humble one.

The ASDR 2020 is ambitious in its insistence that only structural changes and integrated policies can deliver the promises of the 2030 Agenda. It makes clear that achievement, while monitored at the level of goals, targets and indicators, can only be measured in the overall impact on people, societies and our natural environment. It is ambitious in linking the efforts to achieve the 17 SDGs to the framework of universal human rights and all it entails: justice, equality, good governance and a world free from all forms of exclusion and marginalization.

The ASDR 2020 does not offer magical solutions. In that, it is a humble report and asks humility of us all. The humility to acknowledge that we are not on the right track to achieving the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region by 2030. To acknowledge that development policies in countries of the region remain fragmented; that poverty and inequality are on the rise; that a whole-of-society approach to achieve the 2030 Agenda has yet to take hold; that our economies, despite efforts to diversify

remain structurally far from being sustainable and productive. The humility to acknowledge that more courageous and collective efforts are needed to tackle gender inequality and empower women and girls. And the humility to acknowledge that we cannot go on as before in the way we use our natural resources.

Ours is a region marked by conflict and occupation. As the analysis in this report shows, conflict has devastated people, communities and countries and reversed development gains. It also threatens future ones. Ours is also a region of young people; young people who are ambitious, eager, restless and vastly unemployed. They are underserved by educational systems and are full of the potential to harness the power of technology and innovation. Their spirit and energy can be transformative.

This is not a time for piecemeal efforts. Transformative change to more just, equal, prosperous and peaceful societies, across all sectors of development, is not about terminology. It is not a new buzz word. In this region, now more than ever, it is an existential imperative: the region must transform. To do so, it must dismantle the structural barriers to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

This report comes out as the region and the world grapple with the harrowing impact of an unforgiving pandemic. The ensuing crises lay bare our interdependency as peoples, countries and regions. They also bring to the fore the question of our readiness to address and withstand shocks and crises of this magnitude, whether social, political, economic or environmental. Now more than ever, we need to make the structural changes necessary to set us on the path to transformation. As we embark on a Decade of Action, we need to do more, and we need to do things differently. In the name of the United Nations family in the region, I pledge our support and place our expertise and this report at your service.

Rola Dashti  
Under-Secretary-General  
Executive Secretary of ESCWA

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ASDR 2020 is the result of the collective effort of a dedicated interagency task force led by ESCWA, which brought together the International Labour Organization; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; the World Health Organization; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the United Nations Development Programme; the United Nations Environment Programme; the United Nations Population Fund; the United Nations Industrial Development Organization; the United Nations Centre for

Human Settlements; the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the United Nations Children's Fund; the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction; and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

An eminent panel of regional experts on sustainable development reviewed the present report at an expert group meeting, held in Beirut on 21 and 22 June 2019, and provided valuable advice on subsequent drafts. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the United Nations family, colleagues and experts who helped conceptualize the present report, provided information and contributions to sections or chapters, and reviewed drafts. Their understanding of development challenges and possibilities in the Arab region, and their dedication to serving its people, sustained the preparation of the report. Their insights and efforts, in written contributions and in countless discussions over many months, mark the content, form and spirit of ASDR 2020, and lend it its tone of urgency and gravity.

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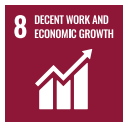
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## NOTE TO READER

### Qualitative Analysis: Framing SDG achievement in the overall context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The present report reviews the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region in reference to the 17 SDGs and the 169 targets and their interlinkages. Achievement is measured in relation to quantifiable targets or targets that set a benchmark (for example, target 3.4 on reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one third by 2030) and those that call for policy change (for example, target 5.a on undertaking reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources).

The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 (ASDR 2020) is not a progress report. It offers an analysis of the root causes that undermine achievement of the SDGs in the region. Using a human rights lens to frame the analysis, it probes the extent to which the situation in the region and under each SDG is inclusive, just and rights-based and reflective of the principles of the 2030 Agenda. Each chapter covers one SDG but addresses the interlinkages among all SDGs. It identifies the main strategic interventions needed to dismantle the main barriers.

The analysis builds in part on the results of the quantitative analysis at target and indicator level. It also builds on a wealth of United Nations knowledge of the region accessed through major United Nations publications as well as input received from United Nations agencies working in the Arab States region. Finally, the analysis builds on academic research from the region as well as a rigorous review process by independent experts from across the region, in addition to United Nations experts and practitioners (see Acknowledgments).

### Quantitative analysis: using the global SDG indicator framework

The report uses the global indicator framework for Sustainable Development Goals developed by the Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/71/313. In order to review and assess progress made in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region, all 232 indicators were considered, but the findings include only those indicators with sufficient data to obtain a regional average, as per the methodology used in this report.

### Data sources and methodology for quantitative analysis

The United Nations Global SDG Database maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) is used

as the main data source for this report. The database provides access to harmonized and validated data compiled through the United Nations System and to a metadata repository. As such, calculation of all regional averages for the indicators was based on this database. The database was accessed between June and October 2018 and a data update was applied in July 2019 for values of 2017 and earlier. Other data sources as they appear in other United Nations publications were also used in the analysis of issues as needed.

Data was downloaded from the Global SDG Database and examined in three steps.

**Step 1 - Substitution of data gaps:** data availability for every indicator/subindicator for the period between 1990 and 2017 was examined for all 22 Arab States. Where large data gaps existed, missing data were substituted using the available most recent data point. Time lags of up to eight years were applied, taking 2009 as a cut-off date. The set cut-off date was exceeded by one year only when rich data for Arab States were available.

**Step 2 - Filtering of indicators:** the indicators were filtered based on two criteria, namely (a) data availability for half or more of the total Arab region's population, and (b) data availability for more than one third of all Arab States set at eight countries.

**Data for each indicator is considered "available" in the present report if all the above criteria are met to allow for the calculation of a regional average. Where data is completely unavailable or is available only in a few countries and does not meet the above two criteria, the report notes that "adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator".**

For each chapter, an "indicator coverage" chart is provided reflecting the extent of availability of calculated indicator values.

**Step 3 – Data cross-checking and final substitution:** all Arab country-level data were cross-checked after the July 2019 major update of the Global SDG Database. In cases where there were significant changes to the selected country-year data points that could affect regional aggregates, step 1 was repeated. A note is included in each chapter listing the indicators that were affected by this update. More details on the data substitution process for the countries affected by this step is available in the online Annex to this Report.

For every indicator that met the above criteria, the aggregate for the Arab region is calculated and compared to the indicator's target value (where available), the world aggregate and the aggregates of other regions. The aggregation method used is mostly a weighted mean of the country values in a particular region, and at the global level, and in some rare cases a sum of those values. The choice of weighting was determined by the metadata where possible or using established precedent in the



literature. The aggregation method and weight used are noted under each figure in the Report.

The online annexes present the data by country, showing the values used in the calculation of regional averages (<https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2020>).

### Composition of regions

The regional groupings used in the Report follow the geographic regions outlined under the “Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (M49)” of UNSD. They are the following: Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA); Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Oceania [excluding Australia and New Zealand]; and Europe and Northern America (ENA).

The Arab Region (designated by Arab in the graphs) as presented in the Report is composed of 22 States located in North Africa and Western Asia and the Horn of Africa. They are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

To allow more in-depth comparison and analysis within the Arab region, subregional groupings are also used in the report following Arab countries’ geographic location and/or economic structures and income levels. The subregional groupings are:

- The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) subregion which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates;
- The Mashreq subregion which includes Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine and the Syrian Arab Republic;
- The Maghreb subregion which includes Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia;
- The Arab LDCs subregion which includes Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen.

In certain cases, data and analysis by United Nations entities using slightly adjusted regional groupings are presented and marked as such noting that the analysis refers to “countries of the region” rather than the “Arab region”. Those instances are referenced, and the endnotes explain the adjusted geographical breakdown.

## INTRODUCTION

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which we are announcing today demonstrate the scale and ambition of this new universal Agenda. They seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. They seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental.

*"Preamble to Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"*

Arab Governments joined the global community in committing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with all its ambition and in all its complexity. Since 2015, efforts to embrace the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are on the increase across the region. Governments are changing the institutional setup for implementation, aligning national priorities with the SDGs, and launching voluntary national reviews.

Moreover, people across the region, including women, young people, public servants, academics and civil society organizations, are engaged in changing their societies, demanding and working for a better Arab world: calling for political change, justice, greater inclusion, broader social protection, better quality health care, education and jobs, and peace.

There is an increasing recognition, among Governments and peoples, that more needs to be done to protect the environment, address climate change, and ensure the sustainable use of natural resources.

The ambition of the 2030 Agenda is great. So is the scale of the commitment witnessed in the region, and the challenges facing achievement.

Five years into the 2030 Agenda, the region is home to some of the worst humanitarian crises worldwide. War has destroyed countries and communities, turned millions into refugees, and displaced many more. Unemployment is the highest in the world, including the highest rates of unemployment globally for women and young people. Women and girls continue to be marginalized across social, political and economic arenas. The region has one of the highest rates of water scarcity globally, impacting food security and rural livelihoods and increasing urbanization. The impact of climate change is disproportionately borne by Arab countries. Civic space is shrinking, arbitrary detention is a major concern, and corruption levels are high. Economies are stagnating, and poverty and inequality are on the rise. The occupation of Palestine continues and the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to sustainable development, are routinely violated.

The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 addresses the major concern that the region is not on track to achieve the 2030 Agenda. In line with the global

diagnosis on SDG achievement, the region has yet to usher in a transformative shift in development.

### Focus of the Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020

The report offers a situation analysis of the 17 SDGs in the Arab region and captures the enormity of the challenges facing Arab countries. As such, it supports the efforts of Governments and stakeholders by assessing gaps, highlighting obstacles, and identifying critical entry points.

Analysis of the official SDG indicators, where data is available, offers a regional snapshot of uneven and worrying rates of achievement. In many key indicators, the region will not reach the SDG targets by 2030, and lags behind other regions on the global stage.

Indicators, however, can only tell a partial story.

The 2030 Agenda calls for transformative change. The 17 SDGs are not meant to achieve progress in 17 different sectors or dimensions of development. According to the 2030 Agenda, the 17 SDGs "seek to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality for all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental".

This transformative change demands paradigm shifts. Mobilizing domestic and external resources is a pressing challenge in the Arab region, and the pace of efforts on the SDGs must accelerate. **However, the present report's main argument is that transformative change not only requires financial resources and an acceleration of efforts but, above all, demands a shift in orientation and approach** towards policy integration, environmental sustainability, and universal human rights with their emphasis on equality, justice, inclusion, fundamental freedoms and participatory politics.

The story of the SDGs in the Arab region, therefore, is also a story of human rights, gender equality, sustainability and integrated development. The gravity of the task, and the scale of the ambition, are greater than measuring progress at goal, target and indicator level. Five years into the era of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, **the present report is a reminder that the starting point**

**for implementation and the horizon for achievement must be aligned** for change to be transformative. It is only through the alignment of policies and other interventions with the overarching framework of the 2030 Agenda that the region, and the world, can hope to achieve the 2030 Agenda. How close, or how far, the Arab region is from this alignment is the story the present report aims to tell.

Under each SDG, the report assesses the situation, charts the linkages to other Goals and targets, and delves into the backstory of the challenges faced. To aid policymakers, stakeholders and practitioners align their efforts and resources with the framework of the 2030 Agenda, the main guiding question of the present report, evident in each chapter, is the following: what is blocking the transformation needed to achieve the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region?

Each chapter considers the gender divide, identifying how and where the rights, needs and voices of women and girls are recognized, and where they are not. Through a human rights lens, each chapter sketches the intersections of different forms of inequality and marginalization, identifying categories of people and countries at risk of being left behind

**The report finds that structural and entrenched barriers block transformation towards inclusive sustainable development in the Arab region.** These barriers are often interconnected and their impact is evident across SDGs and sectors. They reinforce each other and exacerbate inequality and exclusion in the region. **Accelerating efforts to achieve one or more of the SDGs and to secure increased financing will only bear fruit in the long term if these barriers are dismantled.** Each chapter offers a concise list of critical recommendations to dismantle barriers to transformative change and accelerate achievement on the SDGs.

## A report for all people

In the Arab region, dismantling structural and entrenched barriers identified in the present report demands serious efforts from Governments and policymakers. Across many SDGs, the analysis calls for the political will to change course, to choose differently, to move in a new policy direction. Through an integrated analysis of barriers and their impact, the report offers the building blocks to align efforts and enhance policy coherence.

Transformative change, however, is a whole-of-society project. While the responsibility for achieving the 2030 Agenda rests primarily with Governments, people and their agency are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Achieving sustainable development demands the wider engagement of the people of the region. For example, changes to agricultural practices to increase sustainability and productivity can only succeed if farmers and women in rural areas are aware and capable

of using natural and technological resources differently, and if they are able to contribute and elaborate on indigenous knowledge and traditions. Similarly, the continuous assessment of the use of natural resources by Governments, corporations or households is only possible if a free civil society and a free press have access to data and platforms to share information and perspectives. The active engagement of the private sector is also critical in promoting more sustainable patterns of consumption and production, spurring innovation and technological production, creating decent jobs, and strengthening public-private partnership for the common good.

Institutions must change, as well as cultural practices. For example, mobilizing education to drive productivity, technological awareness and sustainability in the region can only succeed if education is re-envisioned across society, at home and in schools by prioritizing critical thinking, creativity and life-long learning. This re-envisioning of education is critical to achieving several SDGs in the region, including those related to poverty, health, sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice.

In addition, dismantling barriers to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the region, a fundamental pillar of sustainable development, can only be accomplished if policies, legal frameworks, and social and cultural values and practices also change.

Despite the strong contributions of civil society organizations and trade unions in some Arab countries, challenges remain. As evidenced in the present report, the ability of people and societies to come together and effect change is curtailed by institutional, political or legal frameworks that impede multi-stakeholder engagement. These too must change to leverage the contributions and capacities of all stakeholders.

## A regional report on the 22 Arab countries

The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 offers an overview of the SDGs in the 22 Arab countries. It calculates averages, where possible, for the region as a whole. It considers structural and major barriers in most countries. While it notes subregional differences where appropriate, it presents the story of each SDG for the Arab region.

This regional perspective emerges as organic when considering barriers to transformative change. Across richer and poorer Arab countries, structural and main barriers are often one and the same. Shrinking civic space, rentier economies, unsustainable patterns of resource extraction, gender inequality, weak science-policy interface, high youth unemployment, weak educational visions, water scarcity, climate change, and conflict and its spillover effects, among others, manifest across the region to varying degrees. The present report

notes variations between different subregions or different categories of countries, including oil-producing and non-oil producing. It also notes variations within countries where relevant. However, its focus remains on identifying the region's main barriers to achieving the 2030 Agenda. In addition, a number of transboundary issues emerge requiring regional approaches, notably conflict and its spillover effects, trade, climate change, water scarcity, infrastructure and connectivity, migration, and issues related to biodiversity and the protection of marine ecosystems. These demand a coordinated regional response.

### Status of the SDGs in the Arab region

The region is not on track to achieve the SDGs.

The analysis quantitatively shows that the region lags behind in many critical targets, including those related to gender equality, income poverty, health-care coverage, social protection, peace and security, the sustainable management of natural resources, consumption and production, and climate change. Further good-quality data is needed to help the region move forward in implementation, follow-up and review. This not only includes better coverage of indicators, but different coverage: better disaggregation, more robust methodologies, more public availability of data, and better use of data produced by multiple-stakeholders. Qualitatively, the policy gaps and the inadequacy of policy frameworks are striking. The region needs an urgent overhaul of policies to address intersectional inequality, environmental degradation, youth unemployment, water management, and people-centred urban planning, among other issues. Missing or inadequate policies derail efforts to address the mammoth challenges facing the region in achieving the SDGs.

The impact of this situation is borne disproportionately by groups that face multiple layers of social, economic or political marginalization: women, persons with disabilities, migrant workers, refugees and displaced persons, among others.

Arab least developed countries also face significant challenges. More than other Arab countries, they stand to bear the brunt of an international system that is falling short on its commitments to developing countries, specific commitments to least developed countries, and the commitment to transformative change at the global level.

Analysis of barriers to transformative change helps chart the way forward by identifying gaps, linking challenges across sectors and SDGs, and paving the way for an integrated policy approach to achieving the 2030 Agenda in the region.

Similarly to an integrated approach to policymaking, an integrated approach to SDG analysis cannot be reduced

to narrowly targeted interventions. There are no quick fixes here, no short cuts. The reader is urged to consider the analysis of each SDG and its interlinkages in the context of the report as a whole. The barriers and the recommendations identified in each chapter, though many of them repeat across SDGs, are most useful when seen in their interconnectedness.

The complementarities and tradeoffs must be addressed in the context of national, regional and global shifting realities. However, patterns emerge across SDGs, barriers and recommendations. This interconnected analysis, at its broadest level, shows that the next 10 years are critical if the region is to change course.

For the region to make a transformative shift, the following emerge as fundamental considerations for the way forward:

- **Integrated policymaking must be enhanced:** From planning to implementation, follow-up and review, the region has yet to embrace an integrated approach that brings together the different dimensions of sustainable development. To a large extent, tradeoffs and complementarities between different Goals and dimensions are unaddressed. While financing needs are vast, especially in least developed countries, non-oil producing countries and debt-burdened countries, policy choice remains a barrier to achieving the SDGs in many Arab countries, rich or poor. Policy change could also be an enabler of progress.
- **The structure of Arab economies must shift towards sustainability and productivity:** Current patterns hamper progress not only on climate change and environmental sustainability, but also on poverty, employment, fiscal policies, trade, and food security, among others. With an over-reliance on oil, rents and investment primarily in real estate and services, Arab economies are vastly depleting natural resources and failing to create the labour demand to absorb people's capacities, especially young people. Efforts to diversify the economy are underway in a number of countries but have yet to make a significant impact. As wealth remains concentrated in a few non-productive sectors, the gap widens between the rich and the poor, and inequality is on the rise. A shift in economic thinking and planning to restructure Arab economies is necessary.
- **The region must ensure full adherence to universal human rights across all levels of Government and society:** In addition to a number of legal and/or political impediments to gender equality and the equal participation of all social groups in public life and the economy, a number of cultural and social norms and institutions contribute to the marginalization of different social groups. To ensure no one is left behind, an overhaul of discriminatory legal frameworks is necessary across the region, as is the need to address discriminatory social and

cultural norms and institutions. A rights-based approach to sustainable development must take hold across sectors to inform integrated policymaking. The political dimension of sustainable development in the region is a critical element in the framework for transformative change.

- **Exerting all efforts to end conflict and enhance governance structures to help build just and peaceful societies is fundamental:** The most immediate impact of conflict in the region is already staggering in terms of loss of life, communities, livelihoods, mass displacement and destruction of infrastructure. However, the long-term impact on people and societies in terms of health, education and their ability to build peaceful and prosperous societies is detrimental. Conflict has not only reversed development gains in the region; it is also sabotaging future progress. The impact on children is most acute and the signs already point to future deficits: increases in levels of stunting, hunger, and mental illness; an entire generation left out of school or training; increasing poverty; and the destruction of homes and communities. While the impact is severe now, signs of its amplification in the future are already evident and must be reckoned with. Despite the large humanitarian response from within and outside the region, more must be done to link humanitarian efforts to long term development and rebuilding strategies.
- **The region must re-envision the role of education and learning and reverse shrinkage of civic space:** Weak educational systems, shrinking civic space, and limited investment in research and development block possibilities to transform Arab societies, address environmental challenges, and enhance prosperity. They also stem the potential and participation of young people and other stakeholders. Despite increased investment in education in many Arab countries, unemployment remains high, and technological productivity and knowledge production remain low. The region needs to move towards a vision of education where schooling at all stages produces creative critical thinkers and lifelong learners with the freedom to access information and knowledge, build connections, and produce and disseminate knowledge.
- **The global community must deliver on its commitments to support developing countries in their implementation efforts:** Inequality in global economic governance structures, unmet official development assistance commitments, and weak technology transfer and capacity-building for developing countries is not creating an enabling environment for countries of the region to achieve the SDGs. The global community must stand by its commitments, including respect for national priorities. In areas as diverse as food security, climate change and trade, as well as capacity-building and technology

and knowledge transfer, the promise of the 2030 Agenda can only be fulfilled if global frameworks transform to support regional and national efforts. Primarily, this entails more equitable sharing of responsibilities, as well as knowledge and resources.

These takeaways guide the way forward to transformative change. At the country level, they can restructure methods of working and coordination; re-orient political will; and unlock the huge potential of human and non-human resources.

Regional action to support the way forward is critical. Where weak, regional integration appears in the present report as a barrier at the country level, and as an enabler where strong. Economic integration is one part of the story. Harmonization of standards and capacities in transport and connectivity is a second part. Promoting cultural change, from gender equality to better diets to educational reform, is a third. The list goes on. Regional collaboration to produce data on the health of ecosystems is vital. Water governance across borders is critical. Bridging political divides, ending conflict and moving forward with a coherent response to the humanitarian crises now, and containing their ripple effects in the future, demand a committed and coherent regional response. Advocating for the restructuring of global governance structures, and addressing the inequities of global trade systems and the cost of climate change demand a coordinated regional response. Pushing the global community to deliver on its commitments to developing and least developed countries can only succeed if the region mobilizes its collective will and capacities.

The present report focuses on a region already united by language, culture and history. Despite great diversity and contrasts in resources and income levels, political traditions, social outlooks and cultural practices, overall the 22 Arab countries share more than what differentiates among them. As the present report considers the status of the 17 SDGs in the region, and alignment with the framework of the 2030 Agenda, a common trajectory also emerges: if structural and entrenched barriers are dismantled, transformation to sustainable development in the Arab region is possible.



## SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Poverty and inequality are widespread across the Arab States. Extreme poverty is particularly high in the least developed countries. Efforts to tackle poverty in the region have not adequately addressed multiple deprivations, rural-urban as well as subnational divides, or the accentuated vulnerability of different social groups. Integrating social and environmental dimensions in economic planning is necessary if governments are to make progress on SDG 1. Also imperative is the political will to design social and redistributive policies to counter increasing inequality and exclusion.

### Key facts

#### From 4% to 6.7% in just 2 years

As a result of conflict, the region has witnessed the only increase in extreme poverty in the world. The headcount poverty ratio, according to the \$1.90 per day poverty line, increased from 4 per cent in 2013 to 6.7 per cent in 2015.<sup>1</sup>



All regional poverty measures, both those based on income and those that are multidimensional, indicate a clustering of the poor just above extreme poverty, reflecting a high vulnerability to falling into extreme poverty, especially in middle-income countries.

#### Arab LDCs

In Arab least developed countries, the proportion of the population below the international poverty line of \$1.90 is nearly 16 per cent. Extreme poverty is higher than the world average and all other developing regions except for sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>2</sup>



Arab countries have employed a variety of social protection interventions, including widespread food and fuel subsidy regimes, and subsidized public education and health care, but not long-term social protection floors that include all population groups.<sup>6</sup>

#### National poverty lines

Using national poverty lines, the proportion of the poor is 5.5 per cent in Algeria, 14.4 per cent in Jordan, around 27 per cent in Egypt and Lebanon, and over 40 per cent in some least developed countries, reaching 46.5 per cent in the Sudan and 48.6 per cent in Yemen before the conflict there.<sup>3</sup>

#### Informality

Despite recent reforms in some countries to contributory social insurance schemes, these continue to target workers in the formal sector and their dependents. They tend to exclude the most vulnerable such as informal workers, the unemployed, persons with disabilities, children and older persons.

**41%** Applying a multidimensional poverty measurement,<sup>4</sup> poverty rates reach 41 per cent for 10 countries with about 75 per cent of the region's population.<sup>5</sup>



Given the low participation of women in formal employment across the region, they remain vastly excluded from social insurance schemes, a fact that accentuates their vulnerability and deprivation.



Access to finance in the region is low. More than two thirds of adults do not have a bank account, and only 8 per cent have loans from formal financial institutions.<sup>7</sup>



The region has high out-of-pocket expenditure on health and education, which consumes 8 per cent of the disposable income of the poor and 11 per cent of that of the middle class.<sup>10</sup>

## Social public expenditure to GDP

Average public social expenditure in the region, taking into account current demographics, is generally low. Oil-rich countries spend approximately

12 per cent of GDP and oil-poor countries around 11 per cent,<sup>8</sup> significantly below the 21 per cent average of OECD countries.<sup>9</sup>

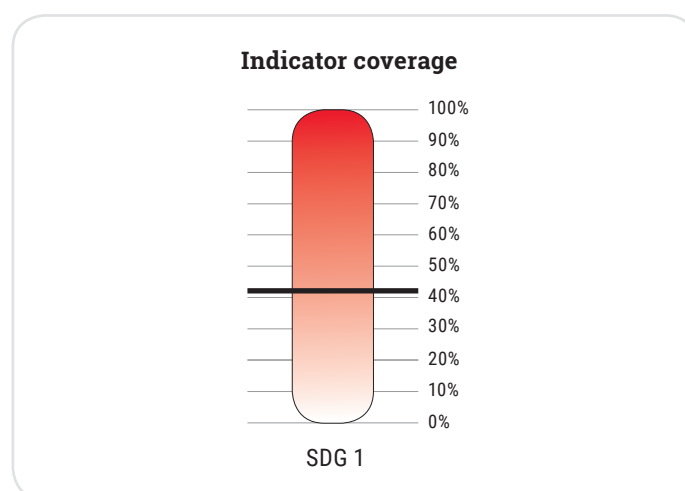
## Measuring SDG 1 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 6 out of 14 indicators,<sup>11</sup> covering 5 out of 7 targets under SDG 1.

Measuring poverty in the Arab region and registering its different dimensions remains a challenge. Only 12 Arab countries have defined a national poverty line and few countries measure it systematically, resulting in critical information and policy gaps. The inability to monitor poverty rates according to the national context, with regular frequency, limits the relevance and effectiveness of poverty eradication strategies. The majority of GCC countries do not have official poverty rates despite observations of poverty, particularly for non-nationals.

Global SDG 1 indicators do not adequately measure poverty in countries of the region for the following reasons:

- The international poverty line of \$1.90 as reflected in indicator 1.1.1 is not relevant for the majority of countries, which are middle-income, nor is it relevant for the GCC countries.
- Indicators are geographically limited and typically rely on household budget surveys that focus on consumption expenditure. These are not administered frequently, and they require methodologies that can be costly and technically demanding.
- National poverty measures mask significant disparities and information on marginalized and minority groups, as Arab countries typically have pockets of high income as well as wealth inequalities and territorial differences. Attempts to measure urban poverty or provide subnational regional poverty indicators remain occasional exercises.
- Measuring poverty is currently dissociated from measuring inequality, and this limits the ability of policymakers to use results effectively, particularly as the middle class continues to shrink.
- Money-metric indicators fail to measure gender-related exclusions in access to resources and employment opportunities. This approach also masks the impact of poverty on girls and boys, the risks to their entire life course, and the subsequent intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- The inability to assess deprivations in human capacities, especially in education and health, leaves many behind and their deprivation unrecognized. Conflict exacerbates these gaps as refugees and the displaced may experience further challenges accessing education and health services.



## The main barriers to ending poverty in all its forms in the Arab region

SDG 1 is grounded in a wide-ranging understanding of poverty and incorporates complex dimensions including equality and inclusion in access to resources, services and participation. It embraces a rights-based approach, gender equality, and resilience and sustainability, and is critical for achieving social justice.

The focus of Goal 1 is on the policy frameworks that produce and accentuate poverty in all its forms. As such, its implementation is intertwined with all other SDGs, and particularly efforts to achieve Goals 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11 and 13 as well as 16 and 17. SDG 1 targets that focus on means of implementation bring into focus global and regional frameworks that could facilitate pro-poor action at the national level. Therefore, SDG 1 couples a focus on sustainable development policies in their social, economic and environmental dimensions with a focus on governance at local, national, regional and global levels. For the Arab region, as has been found in global assessments of progress on SDG 1, economic policy shortcomings are intertwined with governance challenges that render many impoverished people multidimensionally poor, and result in subregional and subnational divides as well as rising inequality and exclusion.<sup>12</sup>

Most contributory **social protection plans** in the region, namely social and health insurance, exclude informal workers. It is estimated that more than two thirds of the labour force in the region does not contribute to such plans, and more than 84 per cent of the working-age population is not actively contributing to pension schemes.

Some Arab countries are introducing reforms. For example, in 2013 Oman created a social insurance scheme for self-employed workers, comprising old-age, disability and survivor benefits. Morocco introduced a social and health insurance scheme for self-employed workers in 2017. Tunisia is providing social insurance to agricultural workers.

Non-contributory social protection mechanisms in many Arab countries are moving towards targeted cash transfers while removing or reducing subsidies.

Source: ILO, 2017; ESCWA, 2018a.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 1 IN THE ARAB REGION

#### High levels of inequality

Poverty reduction and greater equality are connected and mutually reinforcing. High levels of income inequality and non-income inequalities make it harder to reduce poverty even when economies are growing. In Arab countries, income inequality is among the highest in the world (SDG 10). Economic growth is not sufficient to lift people out of poverty because policies to distribute its benefits are either absent or ineffective.



#### Inaccurate measurement and insufficient data

Understanding who is poor and how they are poor is crucial to devising appropriate and inclusive policy responses. Measuring and monitoring poverty are problematic in the region for two reasons. The first has to do with the quality, frequency and periodicity of data collection. Surveys are not comprehensive or frequent enough; capacity to administer and analyse them accurately is limited; and the lack of data disaggregated by sex, age or migratory status, among other factors, is a serious blind spot.



The second reason has to do with the features and limitations of global measures when assessing poverty in a diverse region. The international poverty line or lower poverty line typically used for international comparisons can capture the extreme poverty rates in Arab least developed countries or countries affected by conflict. But national poverty lines are more relevant for other Arab countries. A focus on extreme poverty supports an unrealistic conclusion that poverty is low regionwide, resulting in gaps in the policy response and undermining national efforts to measure and target poverty.

In addition, multidimensional poverty measures that take into account multiple deprivations are underutilized. As a result, policymakers are less able to assess deprivation in terms of capabilities or access to quality services, and to connect the implementation of SDG 1 to the other Goals.

#### Inadequate economic conditions and policies

Most Arab countries have not undergone the kind of structural economic transformation that creates decent work, develops high productivity sectors (SDG 8) and redistributes the rewards of economic growth to reach the poor (SDG 10). Despite periods





of strong economic activity, unemployment was more than 10 per cent in 2017. And where jobs have been created, they are generally in low value-added sectors of the economy and do not pay enough.<sup>13</sup>

Macroeconomic policy choices, and particularly fiscal policy choices, are generally disconnected from development objectives and their redistributive role, focusing instead on monetary stabilization and the generation of economic growth. Already low government social spending as a share of GDP has been stagnating or declining following austerity measures. The quality of public education, health and other essential services remains weak or uneven and thus is ineffective in poverty reduction.<sup>14</sup>

### Inequality of the global economic system

Another problem stems from the features of the prevailing international financial system and the forces of globalization that constrain countries' development policy choices and space (SDG 17). Many Arab countries are short on domestic financial resources amid rising public indebtedness, even as they face externally imposed conditionalities that constrain the role of fiscal and monetary policies in social development.<sup>15</sup>



### Narrow understanding of social protection

Arab countries are introducing new measures to expand their social protection systems, but strategies and services suffer from fragmentation and low coverage. Social protection systems in the region still rely more on contributory, income-based plans that are by nature exclusionary, despite the prevalence of informal -work, the low economic participation of women and high unemployment.<sup>16</sup>

In many cases, social protection is narrowly understood as social assistance, configured as subsidies. It is often a residual policy instrument that comes second to economic policy measures, rather than serving as a rights-based prerequisite accelerating social development, building human capabilities and extending security throughout life cycles and for all social groups.<sup>17</sup>



### Conflict and displacement

Conflict and resulting displacement easily wipe out progress on SDG 1 and increase poverty and vulnerability. The impact of conflicts in the region is long lasting and can reduce households to poverty across generations. While the national poverty rate in Yemen stood at 48.6 per cent in 2014, it is now estimated to exceed 80 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Similar rates have been recently estimated for the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>19</sup> The destruction or weakening of basic infrastructure and the economic impact of conflict exacerbate poverty and place the poor at greater risk of suffering famine, disease and illiteracy, among many other consequences.



## At risk of being left behind

The poverty and levels of deprivation of some individuals, groups and communities are not measured. Their needs and voices go unrecognized in policies, services or budgets, leaving them ever further behind. In the Arab region, the large number of people who are excluded from social protection systems are among those most at risk of being left behind.

Within households, as within societies, those facing multiple, **intersecting inequalities or vulnerabilities** may suffer even greater deprivation:

- Limitations on **women's** mobility and access to justice, land and economic resources exclude them from productive employment, limits their potential, and accentuates their poverty and dependence. Poverty measures do not account for the burden of care work typically assumed by women and affecting their well-being, including through their loss of time for other activities. Time spent on unpaid work is four to seven times greater for women than for men in Arab countries.
- **Children's** poverty is rarely captured in standard poverty measures. Evidence of child poverty is still scarce for high-income countries as well as conflict settings. Within countries, children in rural areas, from households whose head has no or little education, and that face material poverty, are more likely to be multidimensionally poor. Very few social assistance schemes are focused on children, while socioeconomic policies more broadly are not seen as an opportunity to invest in children and protect their rights.<sup>20</sup> As a result of conflict, a generation of displaced, out-of-school children faces lifelong consequences and constrained prospects for prosperity, decent work and self-sufficiency.
- There are very few data sources on levels of income, poverty rates and social protection coverage among **persons with disabilities**. Their lack of access to transport, education, employment and basic services, however, limits social, economic and political participation, and adds to already high risks of marginalization and poverty.<sup>21</sup>

- **Growing older**, especially for women, the self-employed, and those working in agriculture and the informal sector, increases chances of financial insecurity and dependence in the absence of universal or comprehensive old-age pensions.<sup>22</sup>

**Outside formal employment:** Unemployment is high in the region, at 10.3 per cent, double the world average. The rate is as high as 26.1 per cent for youth.<sup>23</sup> The proportion of informal employment in total employment (indicator 8.3.1), excluding the agricultural sector, is also high, ranging from 45 per cent to over 75 per cent in some countries.<sup>24</sup> Poverty is more prevalent among informal sector workers, especially when family dependency ratios are high, as is the case in the Arab region. Unemployed and informal workers, like others excluded from most elements of social protection, adopt individual coping strategies that are often costly and inefficient.

**Migrant workers:** Arab countries host the largest proportion of migrant workers globally. They make up 41 per cent of total employment.<sup>25</sup> The GCC countries rely on migrant workers in the formal sector as well as in domestic work.

Migrant workers across the region are socially, economically and politically marginalized. They often face restrictions on mobility and lack social protection and recourse to representative mechanisms to advocate for their human rights.<sup>26</sup>

**Refugees and the internally displaced** struggle to access basic services such as education and health. The protracted nature of conflicts, the geopolitical implications of displacement, and the unpredictability of humanitarian assistance also have detrimental impacts on their opportunities and overall well-being. The Arab region currently hosts 8.7 million refugees, including 5.4 million Palestinians. In addition, more than 14.9 million people are internally displaced across the region.<sup>27</sup> Conflict also increases the incidence of disability<sup>28</sup> and chronic illness, and it destroys natural and physical resources as well as support networks. Refugees and internally displaced people may remain vulnerable over time, with their poverty likely to transfer from one generation to the next.

**Least developed countries:** Poverty in the least developed countries is connected to the continuing prevalence

The historical case of the **State of Palestine** under Israeli occupation, in violation of international law, has a highly detrimental impact on poverty elimination. Confiscation of land and natural resources, limitations on mobility and access to resources and services, the blockade of Gaza, and home demolitions and arbitrary detentions severely undercut social, economic and environmental development and sustainability. High levels of unemployment, restricted access to markets, and instability and violence are constant. The child poverty rate in the State of Palestine was estimated at 66 per cent overall and 100 per cent in Gaza, based on a multidimensional poverty index adapted to conditions there.

Source: UNICEF, 2017; ESCWA and others, 2017.

“In cities such as **Sanaa and Cairo**, concentrations of urban poverty are usually found on precarious terrain where populations have poor sanitation and lack of access to safe water, and where droughts, floods, and heatwaves occur—conditions associated with several health problems, especially waterborne diseases. Slums are often sites of small-scale industrial production, using informal adult and child labor with attendant occupational health hazards”.

Source: El-Zein and others, 2014.

of hunger and deprivation of very basic needs. It is concentrated in rural areas where a struggling agricultural sector remains the main source of employment and subsistence. Deprivations in these countries can be undervalued when drawing a regional picture that includes them with the GCC countries, some of the richest nations globally. Within the least developed countries, there are also subnational differences in poverty rates. Remote rural areas in the Sudan or Yemen, for instance, are further marginalized. The least developed countries in the Arab region receive relatively little development aid compared to their level of income and development (SDG 10).<sup>29</sup>

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 1

SDG 1 epitomizes the indivisibility and inclusiveness of the 2030 Agenda with its aspiration to achieve sustainable development for all everywhere. Since it connects social justice and equality with social and economic policies, progress on it is also linked to

progress on SDGs 8, 10, 16 and 17. Globally, a reform of international financial and trading systems and governance mechanisms is necessary to ensure that national efforts are sustainable and effective. To move forward on SDG 1, the region needs to do the following.

## 1. Formulate relevant indicators and collect quality data systematically:

- Invest in national and subnational quantitative and qualitative surveys for periodic collection of data, locally, nationally and regionally.
- Adopt multidimensional poverty measurement methods, and enhance the disaggregation of data by sex, location, age, disability, migratory status, ethnicity and other markers.
- Measure various deprivation indicators at the level of subregions, communities, households and individuals.
- Incorporate child poverty measurement into national statistical systems to ensure more regular data that allow for trend analysis to inform policy measures.
- Measure deprivation in crisis settings, such as child poverty estimates in emergency settings.
- Collect data and information on social protection access and coverage effectiveness in local contexts.

## 2. Strengthen support to the least developed countries in line with global commitments and plans of action, including the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Decade 2011–2020:

- Increase development aid and the transfer of knowledge and technologies for sustainable development.
- Enhance capacity-building.
- Promote peaceful solutions, and support representative, inclusive and effective institutions at all levels.

## 3. Reconnect macroeconomic policies to social development:

- Use macroeconomic policies to generate productive jobs while ensuring the benefits of development are widely shared among different social groups and areas. This requires synchronizing monetary, fiscal and sectoral policies. It also necessitates political will to manage trade-offs and mobilize resources for long-term changes rather than short-term policy fixes.
- Redirect fiscal policy to play its redistributive role, and ensure the wide sharing of the benefits of growth as well as the provision of critical social investments, including in social protection systems.
- Tackle corruption, enhance fiscal transparency and improve mechanisms of accountability for fiscal expenditure.

- Reform taxation systems to rely more on progressive taxation linked to social spending, and strengthen enforcement mechanisms.

- Ensure the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources, and provide access to water, energy and food for all, in particular the most vulnerable.

## 4. Design and implement comprehensive, universal, rights-based social protection systems:

- Urgently institute national social protection floors to provide security to all while progressively building up benefits.
- Develop non-contributory, tax-financed protection schemes given significant employment in the informal sector, especially in the least developed countries, where poverty incidence is high.

## 5. Invest in human capabilities, especially those of children and youth, to ensure they can pursue opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, and to help halt the transmission of poverty intergenerationally:

- Address gaps in access to and improve the quality of health care and education services.
- Address inequalities in access to resources and services at the subnational level.

## 6. Link humanitarian aid with long-term sustainable development:

- Develop strategies to couple humanitarian aid and assistance with long-term sustainable development in conflict and post-conflict countries, with a focus on ensuring the broad participation of all stakeholders—including different social groups, civil society and local government—and with a view towards long-term financing.

# SDG 1 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

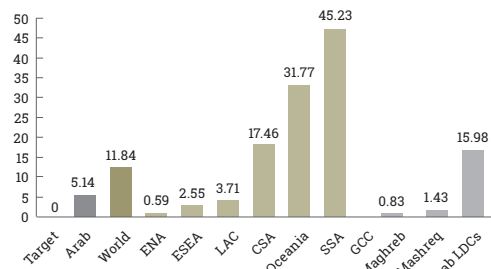
**1.1**  
By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day

## Indicator

**1.1.1**  
Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)

## Data

Figure 1 Proportion of population below the international poverty line (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Sudan (2009), Jordan and Tunisia (2010) Algeria, Lebanon and State of Palestine (2011), Iraq (2012), Comoros and Djibouti (2013), Mauritania and Yemen (2014), Egypt (2015).

**1.2**  
By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions

**1.2.1**  
Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age

For country data, please refer to the annex of the present chapter.

Note: Because national poverty lines are country-specific, there is no aggregation at the regional or global level. See the SDG Indicators Metadata Repository (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).

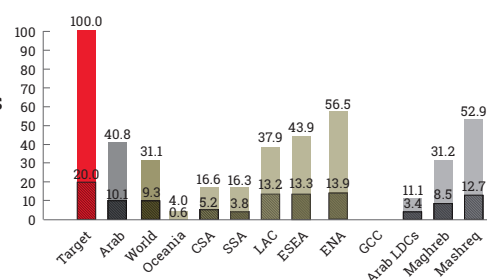
**1.2.2**  
Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.3**  
Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable

**1.3.1**  
Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable

Figure 2 Proportion of population covered by social assistance programmes (percentage), and Poorest quintile covered by social assistance programmes (percentage of population)



□ Proportion of population covered by social assistance programmes (%)  
■ Poorest quintile covered by social assistance programmes (% of total population)

Note: Because the proportion of population covered by social assistance programmes can also include the poorest quintile, we express the latter as a share of the total population (i.e., we multiply it by 0.2). All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Egypt (2008), Morocco, State of Palestine, Sudan (2009), Jordan, Tunisia (2010), Djibouti, Iraq (2012), Mauritania (2014).

**1.4**

By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance

**1.4.1**

Proportion of population living in households with access to basic services

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.4.2**

Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.5**

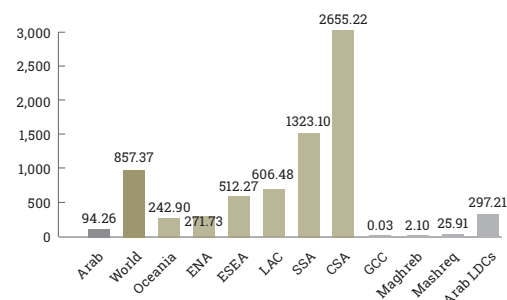
By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters

**1.5.1**

Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population

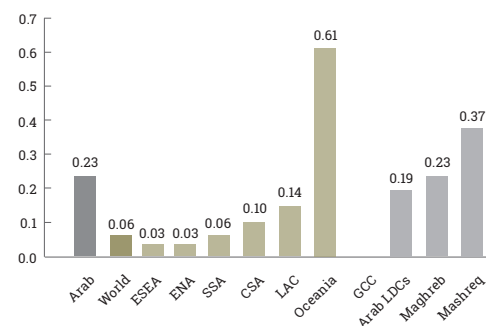
Figure 3 Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people

(a) Number of people affected by disaster per 100,000 people



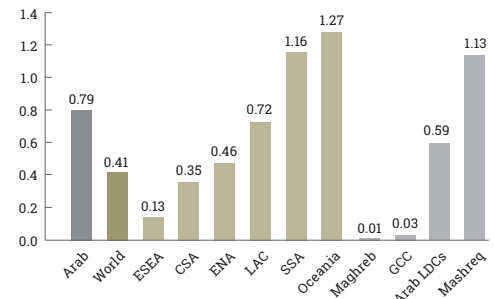
Note: The number of people affected by disaster is multiplied by 100,000, and divided by population, to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Sudan (2017).

(b) Number of deaths due to disaster per 100,000 people



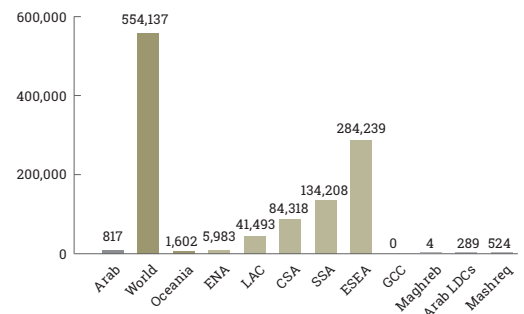
Note: The number of deaths due to disaster is multiplied by 100,000, and divided by population, to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Lebanon (2016), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan and State of Palestine (2017).

(c) Number of missing persons due to disaster per 100,000 people



Note: The number of persons missing due to disaster is multiplied by 100,000, and divided by population, to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Tunisia (2009) Jordan and Yemen (2010), Djibouti and Morocco (2011), Comoros (2017).

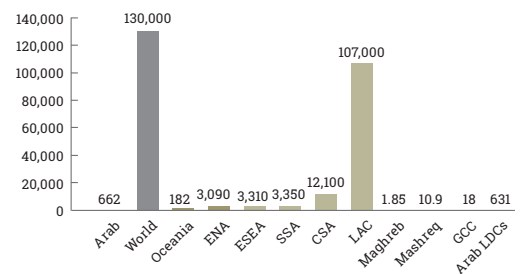
Figure 4 Number of damaged dwellings attributed to disasters, and Number of destroyed dwellings attributed to disasters



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Djibouti (2012), State of Palestine and Tunisia (2013), Comoros, Lebanon and Morocco (2014), Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Somalia (2017).

**1.5.2**  
Direct economic loss attributed to disasters in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP)

Figure 5 Direct economic loss attributed to disasters (millions of current United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Djibouti and Kuwait (2011), Comoros and Tunisia (2013) Morocco (2014), Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Sudan (2017).

**1.5.3**  
Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.5.4**

Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.a**

Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions

**1.a.1**

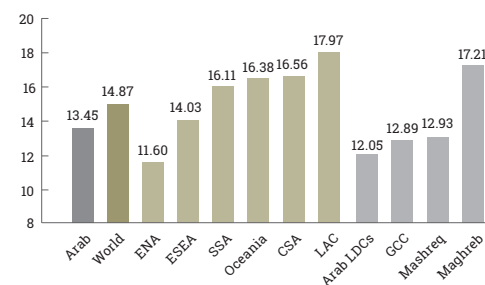
Proportion of domestically generated resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programmes

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.a.2**

Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health and social protection)

Figure 6 Proportion of total government spending on essential services, education (percentage)



Note: The share of total government spending on education is related to the available revenue and the level of development and policies, implying that a high or a low share means different things for different countries. Here a higher share is considered a better outcome (from a developing country perspective). Aggregates are unweighted means. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen (2008), Morocco, Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Djibouti (2010), Lebanon (2013), Qatar (2014), Comoros and Tunisia (2015), Bahrain, Jordan, Mauritania and Oman (2016).

**1.a.3**

Sum of total grants and non-debt-creating inflows directly allocated to poverty reduction programmes as a proportion of GDP

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**1.b**

Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions

**1.b.1**

Proportion of government recurrent and capital spending to sectors that disproportionately benefit women, the poor and vulnerable groups

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) in the following indicators: 1.5.1 [Number of people affected by disaster (number), Number of deaths due to disaster (number), Number of missing persons due to disaster (number)] and 1.5.2 [Direct economic loss attributed to disasters (millions of current United States dollars)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA based on data from World Bank online datasets, POVCAL.NET. Abu-Ismaïl and Kiswani (forthcoming).
2. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
3. These figures represent the latest year available from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a for the following countries and years: Sudan (2009), Jordan (2010), Algeria (2011), Lebanon (2012), Yemen (2014), Egypt (2015).
4. This poverty rate is the result of the Arab Multidimensional Poverty Index (AMPI), adapted to conditions in Arab countries. It includes access to basic services (indicator 1.4.1). Countries included in the AMPI are: Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen, where data are available.
5. ESCWA and others, 2017, which covers: Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.
6. Jawad, 2014.
7. This statement refers to regional country groupings as per IMF, 2018.
8. ESCWA, 2017b.
9. ESCWA, 2017b; OECD, 2016.
10. ESCWA, 2017b .
11. According to the methodology used in this report.
12. ESCWA and others, 2017.
13. ESCWA, 2017b; ILO and UNDP, 2012.
14. ESCWA, 2014a, 2017a, 2017b.
15. Sarangi and El-Ahmadieh, 2017.
16. ILO, 2017; ESCWA, 2019.
17. ILO, 2017; ESCWA, 2014b.
18. The poverty rate (with the poverty line at \$3.20 PPP) was estimated at more than 81 per cent in Yemen in 2018 (World Bank, 2018).
19. In the Syrian Arab Republic, other non-official estimates suggest the poverty rate has exceeded 85 per cent while extreme poverty surpassed 69 per cent in 2015 (Syrian Center for Policy Research, 2016).
20. UNICEF, 2017; ESCWA and others, 2017.
21. ESCWA, 2018a.
22. ESCWA, 2018b.
23. Statistics provided by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States based on ILO, 2018a.
24. ILO, 2018b.
25. ILO, 2019.
26. ILO, 2017.
27. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2018; UNHCR, 2018b; UNRWA, 2018.
28. Humanity & Inclusion and iMMAP, 2018.
29. For more details, refer to the country profiles in the annexes complementing this report.

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## SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

The Arab States region relies heavily on food imports, making it vulnerable to the unpredictability and inequities of global trade. Agricultural productivity is low in many countries, and agricultural practices are often unsustainable, diminishing the medium- and long-term availability and the affordability of food. Water scarcity, climate change and increasing urbanization exacerbate the situation. Hunger and undernourishment are rising, especially as a result of conflict, but pockets of deep chronic hunger are also found across the region. Progress on SDG 2 depends on structured and tailored investment in sustainable agriculture, the broader use of knowledge and technologies to increase agricultural productivity and resiliency, where possible, and an end to conflict. Regional cooperation is essential to shore up resilience as well as to advance a common agenda to improve the governance of global trade.

### Key facts



Conflict has increased levels of undernourishment in the region.<sup>1</sup> Two thirds of people who are hungry are in conflict-affected countries,<sup>2</sup> which have seen the widespread destruction of productive infrastructure, heavy disruption to food value chains and the frequent abandonment of agricultural land due to damage or population displacement.

**> 25%** The region has the highest rate of food imports in the world; many countries record significant food trade deficits. The region imports more than 25 per cent of the wheat traded on world markets.<sup>6</sup>

### 37.6%

Stunting affects 37.6 per cent of children under 5 years of age in the least developed countries. Concerning rates have also been recorded in other countries, including Egypt, where the rate was 22.3 per cent in 2014. In 2009 in the Syrian Arab Republic, even before the conflict there, the rate stood at 27 per cent.<sup>7</sup> Levels of wasting among children range from 3.3 per cent in the Maghreb to 16 per cent in the least developed countries.



Inadequate access to food for the poor and the displaced is often compounded by inadequate services for health care as well as water and sanitation, hampering the proper uptake of nutrients.<sup>3</sup>



The majority of infants under 6 months old in the region are not exclusively breastfed.<sup>8</sup> Compared to other regions, Arab and neighbouring countries have the highest estimated percentage loss in gross national income due to cognitive deficits associated with infant feeding practices (0.98 per cent). The rate is double the global average (0.49 per cent).<sup>9</sup>

### The majority of **undernourished people** live in rural areas

Undernourishment is concentrated in the least developed countries—25.2 per cent of the population in the Sudan in 2016 and 34.4 per cent in Yemen. High levels have also been reported in other countries, including Iraq at 27.7 per cent.<sup>4</sup> The majority of undernourished people live in rural areas where agriculture is often the main source of livelihoods.<sup>5</sup>

### Obesity

Obesity rates in the Arab region are among the highest in the world, especially among women and in GCC countries. Obesity figures are estimated at 33 per cent in the GCC countries, 28 per cent for the Mashreq, 23 per cent for the Maghreb and 9 per cent for the least developed countries.<sup>10</sup>

## 7% share of GDP

Agriculture comprises a 7 per cent share of GDP in the region, yet it is the main source of employment and livelihoods for about 38 per cent of the population.<sup>11</sup> It contributes 23 per cent of GDP in the least developed countries.<sup>12</sup>



Employment in agriculture as a share of total employment ranges from 9.4 per cent in Algeria to 19 per cent in Iraq and almost 38 per cent in Morocco.<sup>13</sup> In the least developed countries, it is 35 per cent in Yemen; 40 to 50 per cent in Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania and the Sudan; and 72 per cent in Somalia.<sup>14</sup>

## 0.28

Public investment in agriculture in the region is low relative to other economic sectors. The region's agriculture orientation index stands at only 0.28, half the world mean and the second lowest of all regions.<sup>15</sup>

**2080** Regional agricultural output could decrease by 21 per cent by 2080 as a result of climate change.<sup>16</sup> The yields of some crops could decline by 30 to 60 per cent in some areas if no action is taken to counter rising temperatures and changes in rainfall patterns.<sup>17</sup>

**1.9%** The average population growth rate of the 22 Arab countries from 2015 to 2020 was 1.9 per cent yearly, among the fastest rates in the world, surpassed only by Africa at 2.5 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Rapid population growth increases demand for food, pressures natural resources and contributes to rising urbanization.

## 70%



By 2050, close to 70 per cent of the region's population will be living in cities, which will change lifestyles and land use, and widen the gap between the region's ability to produce food and rising demand and consumption.<sup>19</sup>

## Measuring SDG 2 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

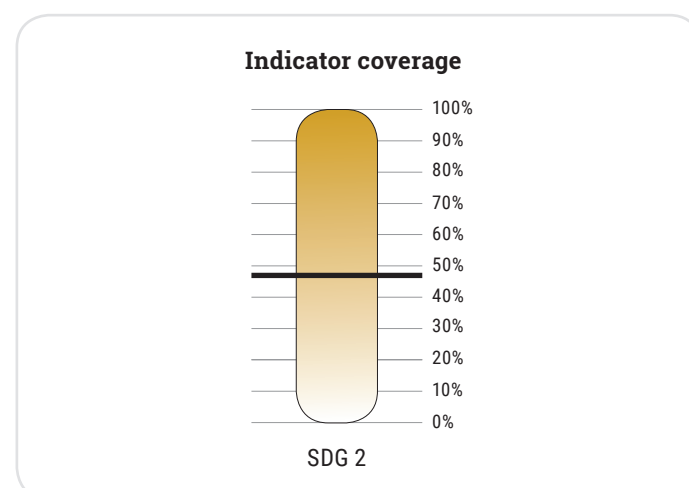
Data are available for 6 out of 13 indicators, covering 4 out of 8 targets under SDG 2.

National averages can be misleading in relation to SDG 2, given the concentration of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in rural areas, or in urban pockets of the poor and/or displaced. Subnational figures, where available, are more telling.

The targets under SDG 2 are varied. Some aspects of food security are addressed in targets under other goals. An example is the reduction of food waste and loss, which appears under SDG 12, target 12.3.

The Arab region lacks data for indicators under targets on agricultural productivity and its sustainability. There is a considerable shortage in agricultural data related to water use and land degradation (SDGs 6 and 15). These are crucial in a region characterized by water scarcity and acute vulnerability to climate change.

Robust data are also needed on trade imbalances—an area of great concern—because agriculture remains a main source of income for many countries, and the region is overreliant on food imports, especially staples.



Given the dearth of data, it is difficult to gauge the gender divide under SDG 2, which is measured in target 2.2 on the nutritional needs of adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating women, as well as target 2.3 on access to land and productive resources, knowledge, financing, etc. The lack of information limits the ability of policymakers to assess, for example, the health implications of nutritional gaps for pregnant women and the fetuses they carry.

**SDG 2 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

**TARGET 2.5** - Maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed

**SDG 2 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2025**

**TARGET 2.2** - By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

## The main barriers to ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture in the Arab region

SDG 2 is multidimensional and interlinked with poverty (SDG 1), health (SDG 3), fisheries, agriculture and land and water use (SDGs 6, 7, 14 and 15), consumption and production patterns (SDGs 8 and 12), global trade governance (SDG 17), inequality within and between countries (SDG 10) as well as climate change (SDG 13).

The various dimensions of SDG 2 manifest differently across the region. Conflict and forced displacement have increased hunger and food insecurity in many places.

For the **least developed countries**, a lack of food security is an individual and a national concern. It encompasses poverty and hunger, and alarming rates of stunting. This is compounded by the prevalence of illness, including from waterborne diseases, and uneven access to and availability of health-care services.

For most of the **Mashreq and Maghreb** countries, a substantial number of people who are food insecure are poor and living in rural areas where agriculture remains the main employer. For these countries, there is a pressing need to improve sustainable agricultural production, with a focus on water conservation and better yields, and to address global trade imbalances.

For the **GCC countries**, food security is primarily perceived in terms of the availability of and dependence on imports, given both water scarcity and a lack of

Arab **research centres and universities** are utilizing biotechnology and innovative solutions to address inherited productivity and sustainability challenges. In addition to genetically modified seeds, safe fertilizers, and smart irrigation, harvesting, transportation, storage and distribution, they are addressing food loss and waste as an emerging issue. Efforts to apply new knowledge and innovative technologies to increase productivity, while taking into account water scarcity, energy demands and land degradation, are promising but not sufficiently scaled up.

In **Somalia**, almost 48 per cent of the population lacks access to an adequate source of drinking water. Over 60 per cent lacks access to adequate sanitation. There is only one doctor for every 43,000 people. All of these shortfalls undoubtedly contribute to high levels of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiency.

Source: WHO and UNICEF, 2019; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a.

arable land. An abundance of food does not rule out malnutrition, as unhealthy and unsustainable consumption patterns are increasing obesity and illness.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 2 IN THE ARAB REGION

**Low productivity and resiliency of agricultural systems**

Agriculture is the main source of income for the majority of people in rural areas across the region, with levels of productivity affecting both the availability of food and the ability to access food.



While agricultural strategies exist, they have not achieved significantly better productivity or stronger resiliency to desertification and water scarcity. Productivity—affecting the amount of food produced in relation to existing land and water resources, the nutritional value of crops as well as the return on investment of different yields—has waned in the past few decades compared to other regions. Water scarcity and climate change have a negative impact across the region, including in terms of the availability of agricultural land and water, notwithstanding the variations among countries. Weak infrastructure and low public and private investment in agriculture and related technology compound the problem.<sup>20</sup> The low efficiency of agricultural practices further depletes natural resources and contributes to food loss.

In addition, a lack of investment in rural development generally has prompted migration to urban areas. Rising urbanization is in turn expanding encroachment on agricultural land and increasing demand for food products.

The population of the region is projected to be 520 million by 2030 and 676 million by 2050. Rapid population growth is also a driver of food insecurity as demand increases and supply decreases.<sup>21</sup> Increasing dependence on food imports further threatens the region's self-reliance in terms of food.

### Vulnerability to trade imbalances and shocks



Due to a combination of low productivity and increased demand, the Arab region is the world's largest importer of food, especially cereals. Global supply shortages and price volatility, heightened by climate change, macroeconomic instability and fluctuating oil prices, all strain the ability of Arab countries to access and/or afford food staples sustainably. A key concern is trade deficits, with countries spending a high share of their export earnings on food imports. The share stands at 5 per cent for GCC countries, almost at par with the global average. For the Mashreq countries, however, it is 30 per cent, and for the Maghreb around 10 per cent. For the least developed countries, it ranges from 15 per cent to 30 per cent for Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen, up to an alarming 200 to 400 per cent in some instances for Comoros, Djibouti and Somalia.<sup>22</sup>

The global trade system can have detrimental effects on Arab countries, which often bear the consequences of export restrictions originating outside the region. In addition, the lack of mechanisms to keep food prices predictable wreaks havoc on the ability of smaller and importing countries, and especially Arab least developed countries, to import food staples.

### Poverty



The inability to afford adequate and nutritious food impacts millions of people in the region. Beyond constraining access to food in general and nutritious food in particular, poverty manifests in other indicators of well-being, particularly in limiting access to adequate health care (SDG 3) and to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6). The combination of these factors inhibits the body's ability to use food properly, placing the poor at greater risk of a myriad of diseases. The result is not only hunger, but undernutrition, anaemia, and in some cases, stunting and illness.

The poor in the Arab region are generally concentrated in rural areas; so are the food insecure. Rising urbanization, however, is now swelling the numbers of impoverished people in cities. Increased urbanization has the added effect of slowing food production as agricultural areas lose both land and inhabitants.

### Conflict



The average level of hunger in the region has been rising since 2011, mainly due to increased hunger in conflict-affected countries. There, indicators of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are already three to five times higher than in the rest of the region. Recent calculations for Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Sudan and Yemen indicate that undernutrition reached 26 per cent of the population from 2015 to 2017, compared to 5 per cent for non-conflict countries in the region.<sup>23</sup> Conflict has destroyed agricultural land, decreased productivity and weakened public health systems, resulting in disease outbreaks, including vaccine-preventable and waterborne diseases.<sup>24</sup> Conflict and displacement are also the major causes of increased hunger and undernourishment in countries hosting refugees.

### Climate change



Rises in temperatures decrease crop yields, and impact the availability of food and the livelihoods of inhabitants in rural areas. Climate change is further linked to macroeconomic instability as well as migration and conflict, with droughts in some countries contributing to riots and domestic instability. While countries have introduced natural disaster risk reduction strategies, these have not been adequately applied, in part due to a lack of appropriate funding.

### Unsustainable and unhealthy consumption patterns across the region



The region has the highest rate of obesity in the world. Obesity is on the increase even in some of the least developed countries.<sup>25</sup> Overreliance on meat and cereals, and lack of physical exercise, among other factors, threaten health and the ability to absorb nutrients properly. For some countries, food subsidies and urbanization are primarily responsible for increasing malnutrition, including obesity, as well as a number of health deficits. The diet of the average person in the region consists largely of cereals, sugar and oil, all subsidized commodities. Wheat intake in the Arab region is double the world average; much of it is refined. This diet, combined with low levels of physical activity among the urbanizing population, increases the risk of obesity.<sup>26</sup>

The ongoing **conflict in Yemen**, now in its fourth year, has devastated lives and livelihoods and resulted in a fast and serious deterioration in food security and nutrition for millions of people. In December 2018, 20.1 million people were severely food insecure, half of them in an extremely severe situation where urgent action is needed to save lives and livelihoods (IPC phase 4, “emergency”<sup>\*</sup>).

An estimated 2 million children and more than 1 million pregnant and lactating women are suffering from moderate or acute malnutrition. Stunting levels are among the highest in the world and still increasing, affecting one out of two children under age 5.

The collapse of the economy and public infrastructures and services, compounded by the loss of livelihoods and disruption of food production, has not only severely compromised the humanitarian and food security situation, but also eroded the coping mechanisms of already extremely vulnerable populations.

<sup>\*</sup>According to the definition in IPC, 2019.

Source: WFP, 2018.

Traditional foodways and local farming, pastoral, fishing, hunting and food preservation systems, passed on from generation to generation, can significantly contribute to food and nutrition security.

Supporting **traditional knowledge and practices** linked to nature as manifestations of the intangible cultural heritage of communities, is underemphasized in the region. Greater attention to these issues could contribute to the global call to maintain the “genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants...promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge” as per target 2.5.

Importing one ton of wheat in the Netherlands costs an average of \$11. In the Arab region, it costs around \$40. Legal, institutional and logistical barriers inflate the **cost of trade** and encumber intraregional trade, which is low in the region. Intraregional trade in the Arab region was 27 per cent in 2017, excluding petroleum exports, compared to 64 per cent for countries in the European Union.

Source: ESCWA and FAO, 2017a; UNDP, 2018; World Bank and FAO, 2012.

## At risk of being left behind

In the Arab region, **the poor, refugees and displaced people** are at risk of being left behind when it comes to SDG 2. More data are needed, however, along with better methodologies to measure the distribution of food and the equality of consumption in households. For example, while young children and women of childbearing age have specific dietary needs, not enough data exist to ascertain whether those needs are being met.

**Female-headed households** are also at heightened risk as women have less access to employment, land ownership and opportunities in general, and therefore less access to food and nutrition.

The **Arab least developed countries** are particularly vulnerable, lagging far behind on the different

dimensions of SDG 2. This vulnerability manifests in higher levels of hunger and malnutrition, and greater reliance on food imports with attendant risks from trade imbalances.

**Arab women** are overwhelmingly employed in the agricultural sector, with the percentage of females exceeding 37 per cent in Egypt, 50 per cent in Iraq and 60 per cent in Morocco. In contrast, the percentage of female agricultural holders (SDG 5.a) is quite low across the region, not exceeding 7 per cent according to some studies.

Source: FAO, 2019; ESCWA and FAO, 2017a.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 2

While ending conflict is necessary to stem displacement and increasing rates of hunger across the region, achieving SDG 2 also requires both medium- and long-term policy approaches that tackle the complexity of food security in relation to the sustainable use of natural resources, equitable access to and affordability of food, and the self-reliance of countries and the region in a volatile global context.

### 1. Strengthen the shift towards more sustainable agricultural systems:

- Scale up existing attempts in the region, review frameworks and implement comprehensive strategies to increase agricultural production and productivity where viable, and increase investment accordingly.
- Utilize innovative, contextualized technologies to improve water-use efficiency and productivity.
- Increase yields and diversify crops using traditional knowledge and indigenous crops where relevant.
- Improve infrastructure for agricultural value chains to reduce food loss and waste.
- Strengthen the commitment to implementing natural disaster risk reduction strategies.

### 2. Invest in rural transformation and development:

- Enhance investment in sustainable agriculture; introduce mechanisms to support small and medium-size farms; and enable farmers groups (cooperatives) to provide feasible alternative services across value chains (upstream and downstream).
- Support rural development through the creation of decent rural employment including the revival and generation of small and medium agro-industries, and the resumption of supplies of industrial inputs to agriculture.
- Enhance regional cooperation and integration in R&D and innovation for agricultural development with a focus on economies of scale, increasing productivity and access to markets, and supporting centres of excellence.
- Link agricultural strategies to rural development strategies to eliminate poverty, enhance health services and support infrastructure development.

### 3. Promote dietary changes and support a shift towards healthier consumption patterns:

- Promote early childhood nutrition to address both undernutrition and obesity, and reduce the intake of saturated fat, sugars, salt and trans-fat.
- Ensure that nutrition services are integrated within primary health-care services.
- Promote nutrition-sensitive agriculture and more diversified production as appropriate to the needs and resources at the national and local levels.
- Adapt national frameworks for the acceleration of efforts to improve nutrition and food security through

### 4. Build capacity through knowledge and technology transfer:

- Systematize knowledge and technology transfers to build the capacity of farmers, women farmers and others in accordance with target 2.a, and capitalize on traditional knowledge wherever possible.

### 5. Enhance the capacity of the region in trade negotiations:

- Unify trade positions where possible and share information on food trade systematically among Arab countries.
- Enhance intraregional trade in part through simplifying and harmonizing logistical and legal processes, and support the emergence of an Arab customs union.

### 6. Bridge humanitarian and development objectives to support sustainable agriculture:

- Design programmes in conflict and post-conflict countries that bridge humanitarian and development objectives to lay the ground for sustainable agriculture in the medium and longer terms.

# SDG 2 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

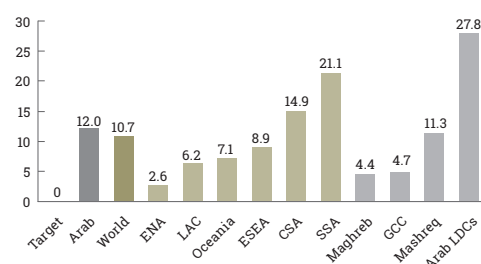
**2.1**  
By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

## Indicator

**2.1.1**  
Prevalence of undernourishment

## Data

Figure 1 Prevalence of undernourishment (percentage)



Note: According to United Nations Statistics Division metadata, this indicator is "an estimate of the proportion of the population whose habitual food consumption is insufficient to provide the dietary energy levels that are required to maintain a normal active and healthy life" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The original dataset provided for this indicator includes data points such as "<2.5 per cent", indicating a value that is lower than 2.5 per cent, which we replace by 2.5. This then constitutes the minimum value (the floor) of the data series. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes data values for the following Arab countries in 2016: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

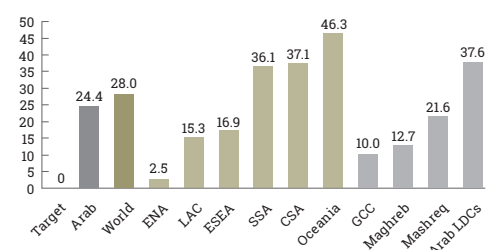
**2.1.2**  
Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**2.2**  
By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

**2.2.1**  
Prevalence of stunting (height for age <-2 standard deviation from the median of the World Health Organization (WHO) Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age

Figure 2 Proportion of children moderately or severely stunted (percentage)



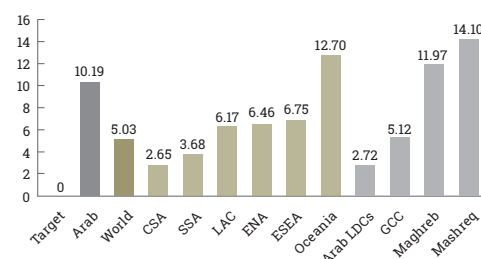
Note: All means are weighted by the population of children 0 to 5 years of age using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Somalia and Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Iraq and Morocco (2011), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan and Tunisia (2012), Yemen (2013), Egypt, Oman, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014), Kuwait and Mauritania (2015).



**2.2.2**

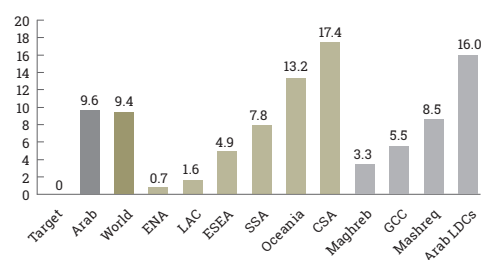
Prevalence of malnutrition (weight for height  $>+2$  or  $<-2$  standard deviation from the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards) among children under 5 years of age, by type (wasting and overweight)

Figure 3 Proportion of children moderately or severely overweight (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the population of children 0 to 5 years of age using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Somalia and Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Iraq and Morocco (2011), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan and Tunisia (2012), Yemen (2013), Egypt, Oman, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014), Kuwait and Mauritania (2015).

Figure 4 Proportion of children moderately or severely wasted (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the population of children 0 to 5 years of age using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Somalia and Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Iraq and Morocco (2011), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan and Tunisia (2012), Yemen (2013), Egypt, Oman, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014), Kuwait and Mauritania (2015).

**2.3**

By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

**2.3.1**

Volume of production per labour unit by classes of farming/pastoral/forestry enterprise size

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**2.3.2**

Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**2.4**

By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

**2.4.1**

Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**2.5**

By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed

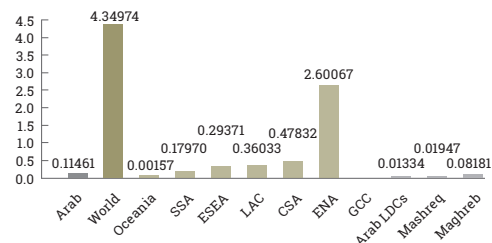
**2.a**

Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries

**2.5.1**

Number of plant and animal genetic resources for food and agriculture secured in either medium- or long-term conservation facilities

Figure 5 Plant breeds for which sufficient genetic resources are stored (millions)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values based on United Nations Statistics Division metadata (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries in 2017: Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan and Tunisia.

**2.5.2**

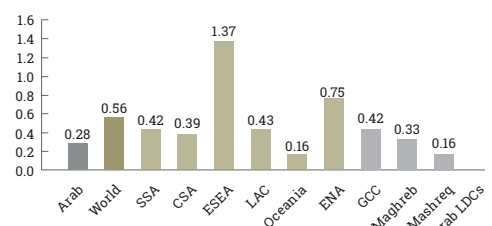
Proportion of local breeds classified as being at risk, not-at-risk or at unknown level of risk of extinction

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**2.a.1**

The agriculture orientation index for government expenditures

Figure 6 Agriculture orientation index for government expenditures

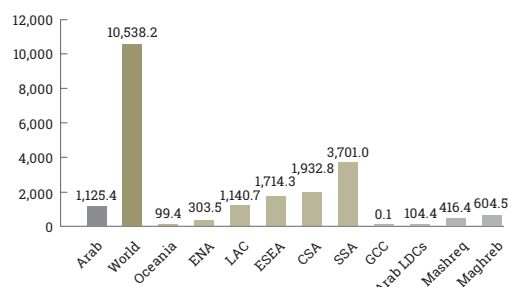


Note: As per United Nations Statistics Division metadata, "the Agriculture Share of Government Expenditures, divided by the Agriculture Share of GDP, where Agriculture refers to the agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sectors. A ratio greater than 1 reflects a higher orientation towards the agriculture sector, which receives a higher share of government spending relative to its contribution to economic value-added. A ratio less than 1 reflects a lower orientation to agriculture, while a ratio equal to 1 reflects neutrality in a government's orientation to the agriculture sector" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The United Nations Statistics Division provides several equations for calculating regional aggregates that call for more data series than available, so the regional means provided here are unweighted (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Algeria and Syrian Arab Republic (2009), State of Palestine (2011), Morocco and Tunisia (2012), Oman (2014), Jordan, Kuwait and United Arab Emirates (2015), Egypt and Lebanon (2016).

**2.a.2**

Total official flows (official development assistance plus other official flows) to the agriculture sector

Figure 7 Total official flows (disbursements) for agriculture, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)



Note: Per United Nations Statistics Division metadata, "Global and regional figures are based on the sum of ODA and OOF flows to the agriculture sector" (United Nations Statistics Division 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Oman (2010), Libya (2016), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2017).

<p><b>2.b</b> Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round</p>	<p><b>2.b.1</b> Agricultural export subsidies</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>2.c</b> Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility</p>	<p><b>2.c.1</b> Indicator of food price anomalies</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) on the following indicators: 2.1.1 [Prevalence of undernourishment (percentage)], 2.5.1 [Plant breeds for which sufficient genetic resources are stored (number)] and 2.a.2 [Total official flows (disbursements) for agriculture, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. FAO, 2018b.
2. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a; FAO, 2018b.
3. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a.
4. Compiled by ESCWA, see figure 1. For more information on country-level data, refer to the annex complementing this report.
5. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a.
6. Ibid.
7. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
8. Victora and others, 2016.
9. Rollins and others, 2016. The regional country grouping is according to the reference.
10. ESCWA and FAO, 2017b.
11. Ibid.
12. Calculated by ESCWA based on data from World Bank, 2019.
13. FAO, 2019; World Bank, 2019.
14. World Bank, 2019.
15. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 6. The agriculture orientation index is calculated as the share of government expenditure on agriculture divided by the share of agriculture in GDP.
16. Cline, 2008.
17. World Bank, 2014.
18. United Nations Population Division, 2017.
19. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a.
20. ANND, 2019.
21. United Nations Population Division, 2017.
22. ESCWA and FAO, 2017b, p. 32.
23. FAO, 2018b, p. 3.
24. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a, p. 32.
25. ESCWA and FAO, 2017a.
26. Ibid.

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## SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Past decades have witnessed significant improvement in key health indicators in the Arab region, including lower maternal and under-5 mortality. Yet overall, levels of health and well-being remain significantly uneven within and between countries. Health services are fragmented and often supply driven, and access to universal health coverage varies widely within and among countries and social groups. Most health systems continue to focus largely on curative health services instead of primary and preventative care, and pay little attention to the social determinants of health. The region as a whole needs to shift to a rights-based and multisectoral approach to human health and well-being, including through consolidating systems and services, enhancing the capacity and numbers of service providers, and addressing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of SDG 3.

### Key facts



The Arab region has made some progress in reducing maternal mortality, but the overall regional average remained at 142 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015, twice the global SDG target. The least developed countries have the second highest maternal mortality ratio in the world at 493 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>1</sup>



Life expectancy at birth is on the rise and projected to improve from 71 years in 2015 to 76.4 years in 2050. Yet it remains worryingly low in several countries, including Somalia at less than 60 years and Djibouti at 62 years in 2015. Conflict, poverty and the reemergence of some infectious diseases is altering a rising life expectancy trajectory in countries including Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.<sup>5</sup>



By 2017, the GCC, Mashreq and Maghreb subregions had reached the SDG target for under-5 mortality of 25 deaths per 1,000 live births. Rates in the least developed countries, however, are significantly behind at 77 deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>2</sup>

### Neonatal mortality

Neonatal mortality has declined less rapidly than child mortality in the region and accounts for over 45 per cent of under-5 mortality in 2017.<sup>3</sup> There are major inequalities among countries, with the least developed countries having some of the highest rates in the world, more than twice the SDG target at 31 deaths per 1,000 live births.<sup>4</sup>

### Malaria

In 2018, four countries (Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen) accounted for more than 97 per cent of reported confirmed cases of malaria in the region, and more than 85 per cent of reported cases were in the Sudan.<sup>6</sup>



Conflict and displacement have undermined primary care including reproductive health and immunization in affected countries, and have exacerbated the spread of infectious diseases.



37.3%

Based on 2015 data, where available, out-of-pocket payment for health care as a share of current health expenditure in the region was on average 37.3 per cent,<sup>7</sup> with large variations among countries, ranging from 6.2 per cent in Qatar to 81 per cent in Yemen.<sup>8</sup>



In the Sudan, only 30 per cent of health workers provide health services in rural areas where 70 per cent of the rural population reside. In the State of Palestine, 91 per cent of health workers are employed in urban areas.<sup>9</sup>

## Universal health coverage

In 2015, the average universal health coverage index for the Arab region was around 61 per cent, three percentage points below the global average. The percentages range from Somalia and Mauritania at 22 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, to Kuwait and Qatar at 77 per cent each.<sup>10</sup>



The adolescent birth rate is the third highest of all world regions, standing at 56 per 1,000 women aged 15–19. There are major differences within the region, with the Mashreq and least developed countries having by far the highest rates at 60 and 75 per 1,000, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

## Family planning

The proportion of women who are married or in a union whose need for family planning can be satisfied is close to the world average of 65.66 per cent, but there are striking disparities within the region. The GCC has the third lowest proportion in the region at 48.70 per cent, which is only slightly above that of sub-Saharan Africa. The proportion in the least developed countries is half that of the world average at 36.68 per cent.<sup>12</sup>

## NCDs

Non-communicable diseases are the main cause of death in most countries of the region. The prevalence of risk factors, such as raised blood glucose, high blood pressure, obesity and smoking, is higher than global averages and rates in other countries at similar income levels.<sup>13</sup>

## Double burden

The region suffers from a double burden of malnutrition comprising both undernutrition and obesity.

## Obesity

Ten countries in the region rank among the top 25 globally for obesity for both males and females, with rates for female obesity often higher. Female obesity rates are 45.6 per cent in Kuwait, 43.1 per cent in Qatar and Jordan, and 41.1 per cent in Egypt.<sup>14</sup>



The prevalence of current tobacco use among people over age 15 is three times the SDG target and the fourth highest rate in the world.<sup>15</sup> Five countries had tobacco-use prevalence rates topping 25 per cent in 2015 – Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>16</sup>



The Arab region has one of the world's highest death rates due to road traffic injuries.<sup>17</sup>



HIV prevalence is relatively low in the region but increasing at 1 person per 23,000 people.<sup>18</sup> The majority of people living with HIV/AIDS are not aware of their status.<sup>19</sup>

## Mental health

In some countries of the region where studies are available, rates of depression and anxiety are higher among women, with depression the leading cause of morbidity in women.<sup>20</sup>

## Measuring SDG 3 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 24 out of 27 indicators, covering all of the targets under SDG 3.

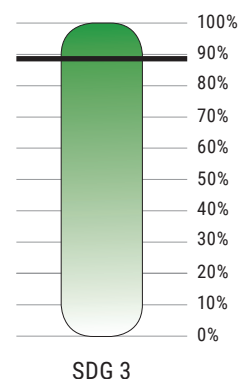
Despite such a high level of data availability, there are a number of limitations on the nature and extent of available data:

- Civil registration and vital statistics systems, essential to measure the health of populations and determine health care and other legal entitlements, need to be enhanced. Only 54 per cent of births are registered in the least developed countries.<sup>21</sup> The completeness of cause-of-death data ranges from 29 per cent in Morocco and Tunisia to over 90 per cent in Bahrain and Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Massive forced displacement in the region has undermined existing civil registration and vital statistics systems, and there are multiple barriers to registering births and deaths for refugees in host countries.<sup>23</sup>
- There is no clarity on the degree to which non-citizen residents, including migrants and refugees, are or are not included in available health-related data. Such data may not be publicly accessible. The results of population-based surveys are not always publicly and readily available in a timely fashion, impeding the efforts of policymakers, researchers and civil society, and weakening accountability to citizens.
- SDG 3 indicators do not adequately capture disability as well as factors leading to poor quality of life or well-being that are more relevant to middle- and high-income countries.
- Sexual and reproductive health data are usually available only for “ever-married women”. Existing population-based surveys do not adequately cover the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people, unmarried or not yet married people, or men.
- Few countries collect data on gender-based violence regularly and over time.

In addition to these regional limitations, the global targets under SDG 3 need to be complemented by improved indicators as follows:

- To measure the quality or appropriateness of health care, the functionality of health systems, and the degree to which health systems engage in prevention and not merely curative treatment.
- To address wider issues related to sexual and reproductive health, going beyond the fertility-focused ones related to family planning and the adolescent

Indicator coverage



### Mental health

SDG 3 indicators only address mental health through the relatively extreme indicator of suicide. Yet mental health disorders are a leading cause of a variety of non-fatal health problems in many countries of the region.<sup>(a)</sup> The age-standardized suicide rates in some Arab countries are less than half the global rate (4.3/100,000 compared to 10.5/100,000) according to 2016 estimates.<sup>(b)</sup> Throughout the region, services are mostly unprepared to address mental health. For example, in some countries, there are 7.7 mental health workers per 100,000 people compared to a global average of 9. Likewise, there are 5.1 beds per 100,000 mental health patients compared to a global average of 16.4.<sup>(c)</sup> Conflict and forced displacement, with the resulting deterioration of livelihoods and the social fabric, have increased the risk of mental health problems. Recent WHO estimates show that one person in five (22 per cent) living in areas affected by conflict has some form of mental disorder. This is more than double the figure for the general population. The rates of depression and anxiety are among the highest in the world, wholly explained by prevailing emergencies.<sup>(d)</sup> Overall, the occupied Palestinian territory has one of the highest burdens of adolescent mental disorders among neighbouring countries. About 54 per cent of Palestinian boys and 47 per cent of Palestinian girls aged 6 to 12 years reportedly have emotional and/or behavioural disorders, and the overall disease burden for mental illness is estimated to account for about 3 per cent of disability-adjusted life years.<sup>(e)</sup>

Sources: (a) Charara and others, 2017; (b) WHO, 2017 (corresponds to the WHO country grouping for the East Mediterranean Region); (c) Ibid.; (d) Charlson and others, 2019; (e) WHO, 2019b.



- birth rate, such as those related to reproductive cancers and male sexual and reproductive health issues.
- To address upstream interventions outside the health sector, such as taxation or restrictions on the marketing of tobacco, alcohol or other health-damaging products.
- To address mental health.

- To address dental health needs and services.

**SDG 3 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

TARGET 3.6 - Halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

## The main barriers to ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages in the Arab region

People are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Their health and well-being are fundamental if they are to benefit from, and drive forward the shift to sustainable development. Health is a critical indicator of human development progress generally.

Significant variations in health-care access and quality exist among the Arab region's poorer and richer countries, poorer and richer social groups, and different areas within countries. Additionally, conflict and displacement have often led to the overburdening and destruction of health services and the deterioration of health indicators. Overall, the region has yet to shift to a comprehensive, rights-based approach to health for all, and a model of health care that integrates social determinants of health into planning and service delivery.

Achieving SDG 3 is intertwined with achieving several other goals and targets. Poverty is a barrier to accessing affordable, quality health care; it is also a driver of risky health behaviours (SDG 1). The poor are often engaged in economic activities that are hazardous to their health (SDG 8), and live in crowded, polluted or underserved areas that might lack necessary water and sanitation services (SDGs 11 and 6), increasing the risk of water-borne diseases and the spread of viruses. Water scarcity and climate change pose threats to agricultural productivity and food security (SDGs 13 and 2) with associated impacts on human health.

Urbanization, pollution and poor transport infrastructure and lack of green public spaces (SDG 11) aggravate chronic illnesses, increase sedentary behaviours and reduce options for exercise, all of which are detrimental to health. The region's changes in dietary patterns are a prominent driver of escalating rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases (SDG 2). In the least developed countries, the world's highest rates of age-standardized mortality stem from acute household and ambient air pollution.<sup>24</sup>

Women and girls of childbearing age continue to suffer disproportionately high rates of illness and death in many countries or areas due to limited access to adequate,

### Health workers

The average densities of different health workers in the region are similar to world averages except for nurses, where the regional average is lower (see figure 23). Overall densities, however, disguise distributional inequities between urban and rural areas. Underserved areas are often associated with low-quality work conditions, a lack of financial incentives for health workers and poor transportation.<sup>(a)</sup> Disparities are also stark in the least developed countries, which have critical shortages of doctors and nurses. GCC countries have a much higher density of nurses, given a tendency for nurses to migrate there from poorer countries.

Source: (a) AbuAlRub and others, 2013.

**Reproductive health** problems are a leading cause of ill-health and death among women and girls of child-bearing age in the region. Some countries have made great strides in reducing maternal mortality, including Morocco, which cut ratios by 35 per cent between 2010 and 2016.<sup>(a)</sup>

Humanitarian settings have seen a rise in early marriage. For example, the percentage of underage Syrian girls who registered their marriages in Jordan increased three times from 2011 rates, reaching 32 per cent of all marriages by 2014.<sup>(b)</sup> Early marriage boosts the number of higher-risk pregnancies and Caesarean sections. Gender-based violence also tends to increase, while access to primary and preventative care as well as contraceptives significantly declines.

Sources: (a) UNICEF, 2019; (b) Sahbani, Al-Khateeb and Hikmat, 2016.

rights-based care. Many face daunting constraints on their ability to make choices related to their sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5).

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 3 IN THE ARAB REGION

### Fragmented health systems



Health systems generally remain fragmented between public and private providers, as well as across levels of care and multiple types of providers, including non-governmental and military services. This results in patchy coverage and availability and quality of services, and it effectively ensures that many social and demographic groups and geographic areas fall through the cracks. Fragmentation also disrupts the continuity of care for individual patients and makes it difficult for policymakers to define health needs and gaps. Few services have been allocated to catchment populations (the population in a certain area seeking services).

Overall, gaining an understanding of population health needs is challenging, both now and over time, especially for marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, older persons, adolescents, women or migrants. Most Arab States have a national health policy strategy and plan in place. It is not clear, however, if these strategies target the needs of different population groups, build on a holistic grasp of health profiles and needs, or link to specific targets and results in the medium to long term.<sup>25</sup>

### Expansion of health services is not evidence-based



The region suffers from a number of weaknesses in national health systems, a situation that has worsened as conflict and forced displacement have disrupted health-care provision and vastly increased demand for services. Expansion of health services is typically not based on evidence concerning demographic and health needs, but rather – and particularly within the private sector – in response to market demand.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, especially in middle- and high-income countries, there is a heavy emphasis on technologically intensive care for individuals with minimal emphasis on lower cost prevention at a population level. In maternal health care, huge disparities persist between low-income countries, which suffer from limited access and inadequate availability of emergency delivery services, and middle-income countries, where excessive medical intervention not based on actual need is costly and pervasive. In Egypt, which has otherwise seen good improvements in trained assistance at delivery and declines in maternal mortality, over half of all deliveries nationally are by Cesarean-section.<sup>27</sup> Similar rates are seen in Lebanon and other countries.

### High out-of-pocket expenditures



Across the region, high out-of-pocket costs deter service use, impede the continuity of care and can lead to impoverishment. In the GCC countries, out-of-pocket health expenditure as a share of total health expenditure is relatively low for nationals. In Oman, for example, the share was only 6.4 per cent in 2015. In countries like Egypt and Iraq, however, it accounted for 62 per cent and 76 per cent, respectively, in 2015.<sup>28</sup> In many Arab countries and for a number of social groups, out-of-pocket spending is now considered catastrophic.<sup>29</sup> Particularly in the least developed countries but also throughout the region, groups who need services most often have poor access to affordable care. The situation is exacerbated by high rates of informality in the workforce as well as substantial unemployment among women and youth.

Highly fragmented health-care coverage accentuates vulnerability. In Lebanon, for example, the national social security fund is the main insurer covering around 28 per cent of the population; military schemes cover around 9 per cent, followed by the Civil Servant Cooperative, which insures around 5 per cent. Mutual funds and private insurance cover 12 per cent each.<sup>30</sup> While some schemes may overlap, it is estimated that at least half the population remains uninsured. In the Sudan, health insurance coverage in 2018 reached 46.3 per cent of the population, with almost 60 per cent of the covered population defined as impoverished or vulnerable, and 56 per cent working in the informal sector.<sup>31</sup>

### Primary preventative care is not prioritized



Frequent bypassing of primary health-care services in favour of secondary and tertiary care raises costs and creates inefficiencies. A larger private sector role in part encourages investment in expensive curative technologies and interventions rather than regular primary preventative care.

The region has only begun to pay attention to the underlying multisectoral determinants of health, such as education, which influences behaviours including health-care seeking and lifestyle choices. This shortfall is evident in the region's fast-growing consumption of tobacco products such as cigarettes and argileh, even as tobacco use declines in the rest of the world.<sup>32</sup> Few governments have explored the potential for fiscal policy to institute taxes on cigarettes or alcohol that could generate revenues while reducing consumption rates. Proven policy recommendations for the control of key health risk-factors are not strongly implemented and often are not backed up by political will to prevent regression.<sup>33</sup>

Another behavioural issue is physical inactivity, which is high among children and adults, and higher among women. National surveys among schoolchildren indicate that 60 per cent to 90 per cent were physically inactive during the last seven days.<sup>34</sup> As populations become increasingly urban, relying on transport instead of walking, attention to the built environment and its health consequences will be critical. Currently, expanding urban centres often lack green or public spaces for play or recreation. Those that are available are not always accessible to persons with disabilities, women and children, who generally face higher restrictions on their mobility. High obesity rates fuel diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, stroke and other chronic illnesses.<sup>35</sup> Road traffic injuries are another widespread yet highly preventable problem.

### Weak regulation and accountability



Even as health service coverage increases, governments have not always paid attention to the quality of services. Across the region, systems of clinical auditing are often inadequate, while quality assurance efforts are oriented around sanctions rather than learning and improvement. Relatively little attention has been paid to stimulating demand for health services, particularly in sensitive areas of health, and to reducing social barriers to accessing care. These elements are particularly urgent for sexual and reproductive health, and for women (including unmarried women and adolescent girls) and young people. Additionally, while vocal civil society and patients' rights movements shape health care in other parts of the world, such activism remains relatively muted in the Arab region, effectively reducing accountability to patients and citizens at large.

### Conflict and crisis



Conflict has led to massive displacement and the loss and maldistribution of health-care workers, and diminished and sometimes destroyed health-care facilities. It has weakened disease surveillance while also creating conditions conducive to the reemergence of communicable diseases, such as the unprecedentedly serious cholera outbreak in Yemen. Conflict has disrupted the continuity of care for non-communicable diseases and widened gaps in maternal and neonatal health care. Within conflict and crisis areas, other challenges relate to the unavailability of medicines and emergency services, as well as heightened risks from surgeries and other interventions where basic infrastructure and systems of safety and hygiene have broken down.

In Libya in 2015, 71 per cent of people with chronic diseases could not get the essential medicines they needed.<sup>36</sup> A shortage of funding has undercut the ability to vaccinate children against measles or rubella, putting them and others in the country at risk of highly contagious and potentially fatal diseases. Conflict is also driving a rise in mental illnesses, which are inadequately detected and treated in both conflict and non-conflict countries.<sup>37</sup>

**Government expenditure on health-care** in the region is increasing overall, although it remains relatively low compared to other regions.<sup>(a)</sup> As a percentage of total government expenditure, spending ranged from 3.9 per cent in Yemen to 14.2 per cent in Tunisia in 2014. The regional mean of 8.3 per cent in 2014 marked a slight increase from 8 per cent in 2004. From 2004 to 2014, general government expenditure on health as a percentage of total government expenditure decreased in nine Arab States and increased in 11, with the largest increases in Iraq (104 per cent), the Sudan (78 per cent) and Bahrain (20 per cent). The largest drops were in Qatar (-40 per cent), Yemen (-36 per cent) and the Syrian Arab Republic (-30 per cent).<sup>(b)</sup>

Sources: (a) World Bank, 2013; (b) WHO, 2014.

**Excise taxes** have recently been introduced in GCC countries on products harmful to human health. Measures include a 50 per cent levy on carbonated drinks and a 100 per cent levy on tobacco products and energy drinks. In 2019, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates introduced similar levies on electronic smoking devices and products with added sugars or sweeteners.

Source: ESCWA, 2019.

While data are scarce, some existing studies on **medical tourism** in the region indicate significant economic benefits, especially in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. In the last alone, returns reached \$250 million in 2015. More studies are needed to determine the impacts of medical tourism, including to see if it weakens service delivery for local populations by diverting resources towards more expensive and curative interventions.<sup>(a)</sup> More research is also needed to address uneven concentrations of health expertise, including through the migration of doctors and nurses within the region.

Sources: (a) Dewachi, 2018; Lertora, 2016.

The unavailability and weak classification of health-related data are linked in part to **limited research and development** in the region. In 2013, its collective spending on medical research was 1 per cent of global scientific research spending, and less than half of the amount spent in either the Islamic Republic of Iran or Turkey.

Source: Dewachi, 2018.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, between 2011 and 2019, 588 attacks on 350 separate health-care facilities were documented as well as the killing of 914 medical personnel. In **Yemen**, as of April 2018, 49 per cent of health facilities were either not functioning or only partially functioning due to staff shortages, a lack of supplies, the inability to meet operational costs or limited access. Fewer specialized staff were working in district and tertiary hospitals; 53 per cent of health facilities lacked general practitioners; and 45 per cent of functional hospitals had no specialists. With only 1 health worker per 1,000 people, Yemen reaches less than half the WHO minimum benchmark. Most equipment in hospitals is non-functioning or obsolete, and many health personnel have not received regular salaries for two years.

Sources: Physicians for Human Rights, 2019; OCHA, 2019.

## At risk of being left behind

Across the region, the following groups of people are often among those most at risk of being left behind, even as they stand to gain the most from health improvements.

**The poor and uninsured:** High out-of-pocket expenditures for health care hit the poorest the hardest and can push people below or further below the poverty line. Amid privatization, economic reforms and economic decline, and the damage caused by conflict, low-cost and free health care have become less available. Private-sector care has expanded, and in several countries, the majority of health care is now offered privately. Yet many social groups lack access to formal health insurance to defray rising care and medication costs. They include youth, with unemployment rates that are the highest in the world, and women, with low formal labour force participation. Many workers in general are self-employed or involved in the informal sector, and lack health-related benefits.<sup>38</sup>

**Arab least developed countries:** These nations perform worst on almost all SDG 3 indicators. There is a stark 10-fold difference, for example, between the neonatal mortality rates of less than 4 per 1,000 in the richest countries versus nearly 40 in the poorest countries.<sup>39</sup> Extreme differences also occur in the coverage of essential services, which ranges from a low of 22 per cent in Somalia to 77 per cent in Kuwait.<sup>40</sup> In Mauritania in 2009, there were 12.7 physicians per 100,000 people, compared to 343 per 100,000 in Jordan in 2015.<sup>41</sup>

**Refugees, internally displaced people and conflict-affected populations:** Conflict has undermined health-care access, destroyed health-care facilities, and propelled an exodus of trained health-care personnel along with shortages in medicine and equipment. Massive displacement and social and economic disruption can increase mental health problems as well as gender-based violence. Crowded conditions in camps for internally displaced people or refugees spread infectious diseases amid weak disease control.

Conflicts in the region have been occurring in middle-income settings where non-communicable diseases

**Access to health-care facilities** varies across the region. In Tunisia, for example, around 90 per cent of the population lives less than 5 kilometres from a health facility. By contrast, in Yemen, 14.8 million people lack access to basic health care, including 8.8 million people in severely underserved areas. In Morocco, around 25 per cent of the population currently lives more than 10 kilometres from a formal health centre, and over 40 per cent of people struggle to obtain hospital care.

Source: WHO EMRO, 2019b.

“The limited and unpredictable electricity supply to the **Gaza Strip**, with an average of seven hours of electricity per day from the grid in 2018, has severe implications for the health sector. Hospitals and clinics depend on the provision of fuel to supply emergency generators, with fuel shortages and electricity outages potentially putting the lives of patients at risk. The legislative and physical division of the West Bank has created particularly vulnerable populations in Area C, the Seam Zone and H2 in Hebron. Of approximately 330 000 Palestinian residents in these areas, 114 000 (35%) have limited access to primary health care. Mobile clinics are currently serving 135 communities, but uncertainties of funding cast doubt over the sustainability of these services. Efforts to establish more permanent facilities for some communities are hampered by restrictive planning policies towards Palestinians in Area C, where Israel has civil and military control”.

Source: WHO, 2019b.

are dominant. Forced displacement may therefore mean interruption of cancer, diabetes or hypertension treatment, or disruptions in access to essential medications for a wide range of other conditions. Three-quarters of Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries are women and children, whose access to antenatal, delivery,

immunization and other services has fallen.<sup>42</sup> Local health systems have staggered under enormous pressure from absorbing large flows of refugees, with no end in sight from protracted crises. The humanitarian system too has struggled to cope with health needs.

**Persons with disabilities:** Special health-care needs of persons with disabilities—both physical and cognitive—are not adequately addressed. Barriers to access intensify with intersecting inequalities such as persons with disabilities in rural, refugee or other marginalized communities. Financial difficulties as well as lack of information about available services also play roles in excluding persons with disabilities from health-care services.<sup>43</sup>

**Non-national residents and migrants:** The Arab region—particularly the GCC countries—has some of the highest shares of non-national residents or migrants in the world, including as workers in the health sector. With few publicly available data about these groups, relatively little is known about their health needs, service use and service barriers.

**Adolescents:** Compared to those in the rest of the world, adolescents in the region have higher rates of transport injuries, cardiovascular and metabolic conditions as well as mental health problems.<sup>44</sup> Yet health-care providers have generally not been sensitized and services have not been tailored to meet the health needs of this group. The lack of comprehensive health education in schools, including sexuality education, or the reluctance to teach it has meant that young people often rely on the Internet or peers for information, which may be inaccurate. Unmarried adolescents, men and women, face social barriers in raising issues concerning their sexual and reproductive health with health-care providers.

**Women and girls:** Lack of sufficient attention to gender considerations in health is reflected in the fact that among all the indicators for SDG 3, only six have sufficient sex-disaggregated data in the region. Maternal mortality ratios remain high, driven by bleeding, infections and high blood pressure during pregnancies, among other factors, all of which are preventable with timely and quality care. Access to pre- and postnatal care

While **migrants** often begin their journey with a health advantage, since those who are healthy are more likely to migrate, adverse living and working conditions soon heighten their vulnerability to disease and injury. Who pays for health coverage, how inclusive coverage is and the quality of services that migrants can access all impact their ability to lead healthy lives. Specific migrant groups are more vulnerable to being excluded from health coverage. These include irregular migrants, children, women and older persons. Some promising practices in recent years in a few countries comprise efforts to ensure that regular migrants can at least participate in medical assistance schemes targeting low-income people.

Source: ESCWA and IOM, 2019.

varies significantly. Little is known about the extent of access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care in the region, as social barriers persist in using services and asking for information. In addition, millions of girls still fall victim to female genital mutilation in a number of countries, suffering harm that lasts throughout their lives.

Data in several countries indicate that the female-to-male ratio of HIV prevalence is below rates in other regions of the world, but this may indicate lower use of voluntary testing and detection among women.<sup>45</sup> Lower detection is attributed to stigma and difficulties in accessing services as well as a lack of knowledge about the potential risks of unsafe sex, even within marriage. Women sometimes will not come forward for testing if a husband's consent is needed, or due to restrictions on mobility, difficulties in accessing transport and childcare, and limited treatment literacy.<sup>46</sup> This carries grave implications for women's overall well-being, including physical and mental health.

Gender-based violence remains pervasive, as an estimated 37 per cent of ever-partnered women in some countries of the region have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.<sup>47</sup>

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 3

Only an integrated, rights-based approach to health and health-care systems can deliver more comprehensive coverage and better quality for all, and meet the health needs of different groups, including women and girls. It would also engage populations in achieving SDG

3 through better education and awareness (SDG 4). This should, in turn, improve the governance of health care and increase transparency in service planning, budgeting and delivery (SDG 16).

## 1. Expand evidence-based health services and health coverage, and enhance affordability:

- Formulate a national vision for universal health coverage and a road map towards its realization, taking into account country-specific health system challenges, macroeconomic outlooks and people's needs.
- Integrate targets and results in health strategies that address health needs and gaps in different areas and for different social and demographic groups, including persons with disabilities, women and girls, older persons, adolescents and others.
- Define national essential or priority health service packages, including preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative services related to communicable and non-communicable diseases across the life course, and develop appropriate people-centred, integrated models of care with functioning referral systems.
- Establish/reconfigure prepayment arrangements for various population groups, leaving no one behind. These should be financed via budget allocation and/or mandatory contributions to reduce fragmentation, enhance equity and promote financial and social protection.
- Ensure a human rights based approach to sexual and reproductive health, backed by requisite budgetary allocations.
- Expand the goal of universal health coverage to include non-nationals residing within national territories, including refugees and migrant workers as well as other marginalized groups.

## 2. Improve the quality of health care:

- Reorient health systems towards more prevention, with an emphasis on primary health care, enhanced local primary health-care centres and encouragement of patient follow-up.
- Improve regulatory frameworks to make health services more accountable to citizens. Ministries of health can introduce better regulations to uphold the quality of care through institutionalized systems of audit and surveillance.
- Improve knowledge of health-care needs to inform better planning, implementation and impact assessments of health services.
- Work towards a cultural change in health-care systems by tracking patient safety and medical errors. This could use a no-blame approach and aim at better documentation of patient safety problems.

- Strengthen health systems governance and institutional arrangements as well as supportive legislation to improve performance and accountability, and mitigate the risk of corruption.
- Address shortages and create incentives to reduce the emigration of health professionals, including nurses.
- Promote a whole-of-government approach, conduct a health impact assessment of all public health policies, and engage parliamentarians, civil society and the private sector in health sector efforts to enhance social protection strategies.
- Enable civil society action around health and health services to increase accountability to consumers and citizens. This could entail adopting and enforcing access to information legislation, and lifting limitations on the work of civil society generally.

## 3. Intervene upstream to address the determinants of health:

- Integrate risk factors accounting for a huge increase in non-communicable diseases into public health strategies, making links to consumption and environmental factors.
- Integrate health dimensions across national development plans and sectoral strategies, including those related to urban planning, transport, energy, and water and sanitation.
- Introduce regulatory frameworks to control salt, trans-fats and other additives, and introduce deliberate fiscal policies and regulation for the marketing of alcohol, tobacco and sugary drinks, among other products with proven health impacts. Further, provide comprehensive nutrition information to consumers.
- Integrate health into educational curricula at early stages to raise awareness of health risks, enhance literacy on sexual and reproductive health, and promote behavioural and environmental changes in line with better health.
- Monitor compliance with road safety legislation to address an epidemic of traffic accidents affecting both drivers and pedestrians, particularly young people.
- Target the prevention and treatment of malnutrition among pregnant women and children up to 2 years of age. Promote adequate micronutrient intake and exclusive breastfeeding up to six months and continued breastfeeding for two years.

#### 4. Invest in better monitoring, data and analysis:

- Invest in better and more comprehensive data collection especially at subnational levels, as well as the capacity and willingness to analyse data to develop accountable and evidence-informed policies.
- Improve data disaggregation by sex, age and other relevant variables. This can be done in part through enhanced systems of vital registration, including for non-nationals (refugees and migrants).
- Enhance the collection of data on gender-based violence, and coordinate its generation across different social sectors, and legal and law enforcement entities.
- Ensure better use of extensively available administrative data collected by health-care systems.
- Promote digital health, and strengthen routine data sources while also introducing non-formal data sources for early detection and monitoring of trends in diseases.
- Commit to making data publicly available in line with global trends and the call in SDG 16 to advance knowledge, and increase transparency and accountability.

#### 5. Strengthen regional and country-level capacities for emergency preparedness and responses to all hazards:

- Adopt a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach to provide integrated assistance to countries affected by emergencies.
- Advance specific capacities to prevent, detect and respond to emerging infectious diseases and to seasonal and pandemic influenza.
- Strengthen systems and capacities to address sexual and reproductive health needs and maternal health issues in humanitarian settings.
- Strengthen overall emergency management capacities in the region by undertaking all-hazard risk profiling, and developing all-hazard emergency preparedness and response plans.
- Strengthen systems and capacities for managing trauma and injury, especially violent trauma in conflict settings.
- Integrate efforts to reduce and respond to gender-based violence in health and social services targeting refugee and forcibly displaced populations.

## SDG 3 targets and indicators in the Arab region

### Target

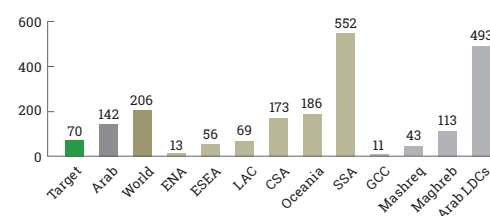
**3.1**  
By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

### Indicator

**3.1.1**  
Maternal mortality ratio

### Data

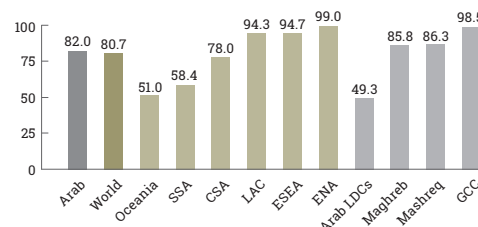
Figure 1 Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)



Note: All means are weighted by the total number of births for 2011 taken from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the 2015 data values of all Arab countries except the Sudan. Data availability was negatively affected by weighting by the denominator (live births in 2015), so a compromise was made to weight by the latest data available for the total number of births for 2011 instead.

### 3.1.2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

Figure 2 Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (percentage)

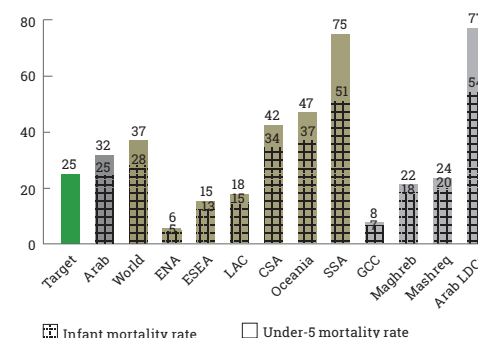


Note: All means are weighted by the total number of births (i.e., the denominator) for 2011 taken from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Morocco (2011), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia (2012), Libya, Saudi Arabia and Yemen (2013), Egypt, Oman and State of Palestine (2014), Bahrain, Kuwait, Mauritania, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (2015).

### 3.2 By 2030, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births

#### 3.2.1 Under-5 mortality rate

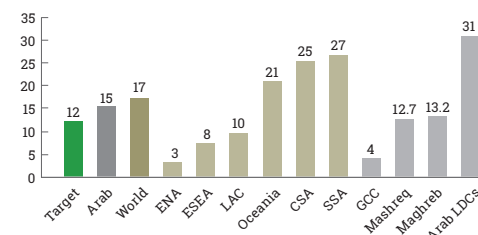
Figure 3 Under-5 mortality rate and infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Note: All means are weighted by the total number of births for 2011 taken from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b. The calculated Arab regional aggregates of both series include the 2017 data values of all Arab countries except the Sudan. We visualize and analyse the two series using a stacked bar chart since they measure different facets and intensities of preventable child mortality, and the under5- mortality rate includes the infant mortality rate (more details in the Annex). For each series, data availability was negatively affected by weighting by the denominator (live births in 2015), so a compromise was made to weight by the latest available data on the total number of births for 2011.

#### 3.2.2 Neonatal mortality rate

Figure 4 Neonatal mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)



Note: All means are weighted by the total number of births for 2011 taken from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the 2017 data values of all Arab countries except the Sudan. Data availability was negatively affected by weighting by the denominator (live births in 2015), so a compromise was made to weight by the latest data available for the total number of births for 2011.



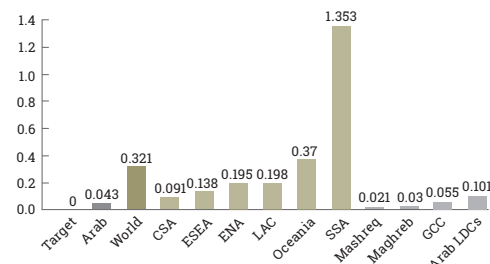
### 3.3

By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

#### 3.3.1

Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population, by sex, age and key populations

Figure 5 Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population

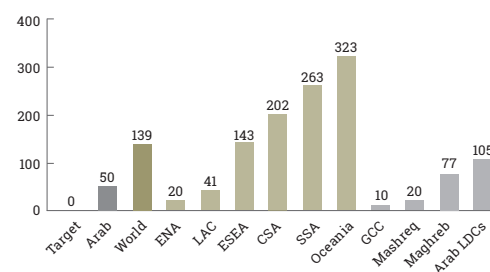


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia. Ideally, we would weight by the total number of uninfected population, which is the denominator. To get to this variable, we would need to use WHO data on total number of people living with HIV and subtract it from total population data. More than one quarter of the world's countries are not covered by this particular data, however. Therefore, we weighted by total population (2015 is the latest available year) as a proxy.

#### 3.3.2

Tuberculosis incidence per 1,000 population

Figure 6 Tuberculosis incidence per 100,000 population

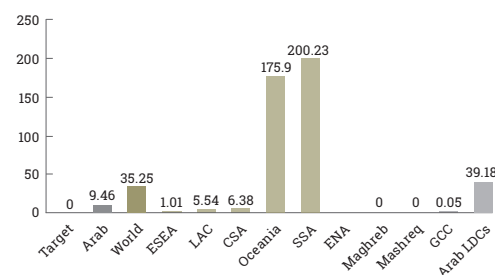


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017 and United Nations Statistics Division 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2016.

#### 3.3.3

Malaria incidence per 1,000 population

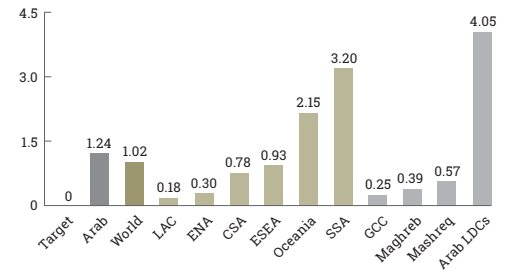
Figure 7. Malaria incidence per 1,000 population at risk



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

**3.3.4**  
Hepatitis B incidence per 100,000 population

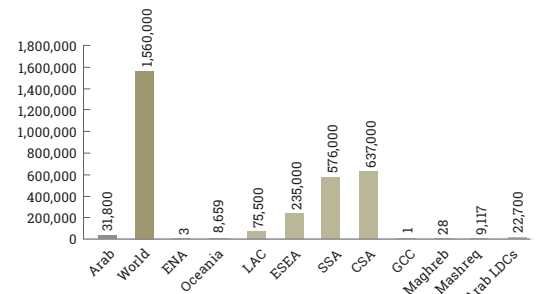
**Figure 8** Prevalence of Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2015.

**3.3.5**  
Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases

**Figure 9** Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases (thousands)

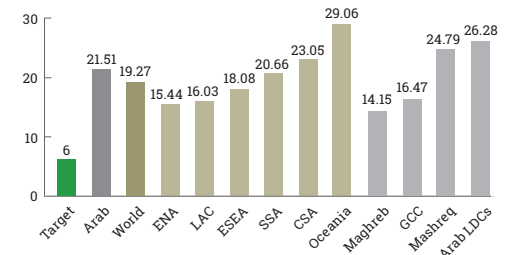


Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2017.

**3.4**  
By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being

**3.4.1**  
Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease

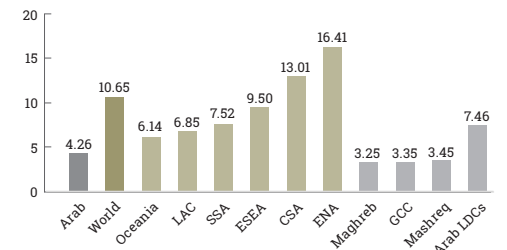
**Figure 10** Mortality rate attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease (probability, percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**3.4.2**  
Suicide mortality rate

**Figure 11** Suicide mortality rate (number of suicides per 100,000 population)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**3.5**

Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol

**3.5.1**

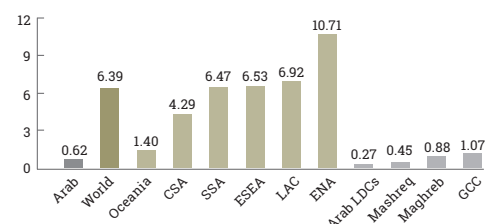
Coverage of treatment interventions (pharmacological, psychosocial and rehabilitation and aftercare services) for substance use disorders

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**3.5.2**

Harmful use of alcohol, defined according to the national context as alcohol per capita consumption (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year in litres of pure alcohol

Figure 12 Alcohol consumption per capita (aged 15 years and older) within a calendar year (litres of pure alcohol)



Note: All means are weighted by total population aged 15 years and above, using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

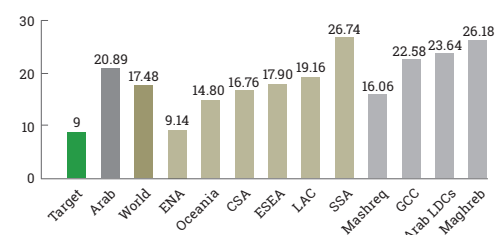
**3.6**

By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents

**3.6.1**

Death rate due to road traffic injuries

Figure 13 Death rate due to road traffic injuries (number of deaths per 100,000 population)



Note: All means are population weighted using 2013 population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2013.

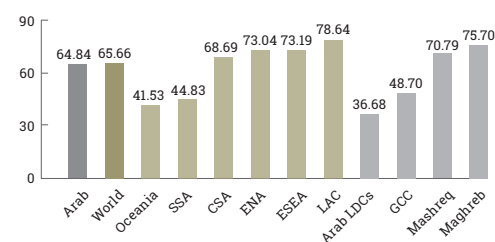
**3.7**

By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes

**3.7.1**

Proportion of women of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods

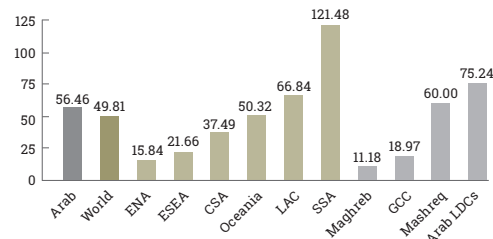
Figure 14 Proportion of women married or in a union of reproductive age (aged 15-49 years) who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the total population of women aged 15-49 in 2014 (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Iraq and Morocco (2011), Comoros, Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia (2012), Algeria and Yemen (2013), Egypt, Oman, State of Palestine, and Sudan (2014) and Mauritania (2015).

**3.7.2**  
Adolescent birth rate (aged 10-14 years; aged 15-19 years) per 1,000 women in that age group

**Figure 15** Adolescent birth rate (per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years)

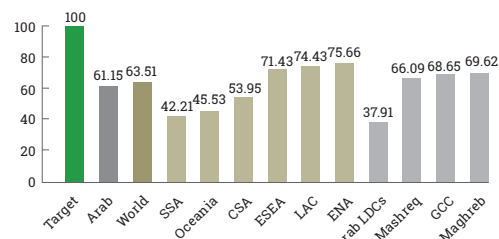


Note: All means are weighted by the total population of women aged 15–19 in 2015 (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Iraq, Syrian Arab Republic and United Arab Emirates (2009), Djibouti (2010), Comoros, Jordan, Mauritania, Somalia and Tunisia (2011), Egypt and Yemen (2012), Algeria, Libya and Sudan (2013), Bahrain and State of Palestine (2014), Kuwait and Qatar (2015) and Oman (2016).

**3.8**  
Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all

**3.8.1**  
Coverage of essential health services (defined as the average coverage of essential services based on tracer interventions that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access, among the general and the most disadvantaged population)

**Figure 16** Universal health service coverage index (index from 0 to 100)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2015.

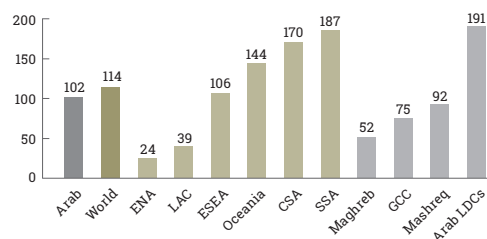
**3.8.2**  
Proportion of population with large household expenditures on health as a share of total household expenditure or income

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**3.9**  
By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination

**3.9.1**  
Mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution

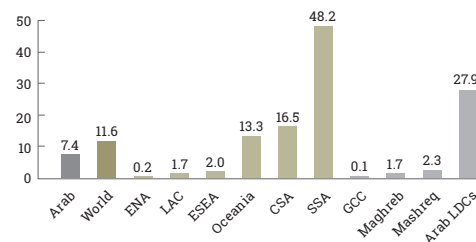
**Figure 17** Age-standardized mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution (number of deaths per 100,000 population)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**3.9.2**  
Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (exposure to unsafe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) services)

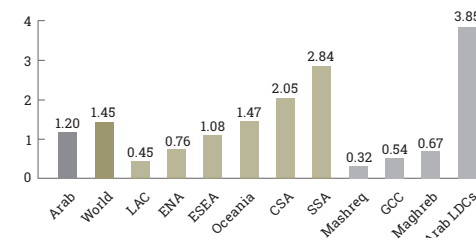
**Figure 18** Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene (number of deaths per 100,000 population)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**3.9.3**  
Mortality rate attributed to unintentional poisoning

**Figure 19** Mortality rate attributed to unintentional poisonings (index, number of deaths per 100,000 population)

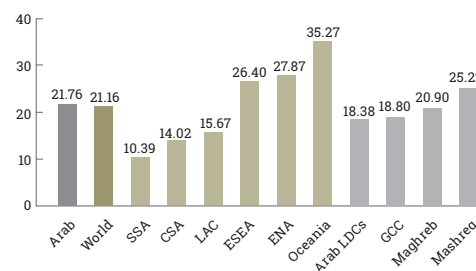


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**3.a**  
Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate

**3.a.1**  
Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older

**Figure 20** Age-standardized prevalence of current tobacco use among persons aged 15 years and older (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by total population aged 15 years and above, using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2015: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

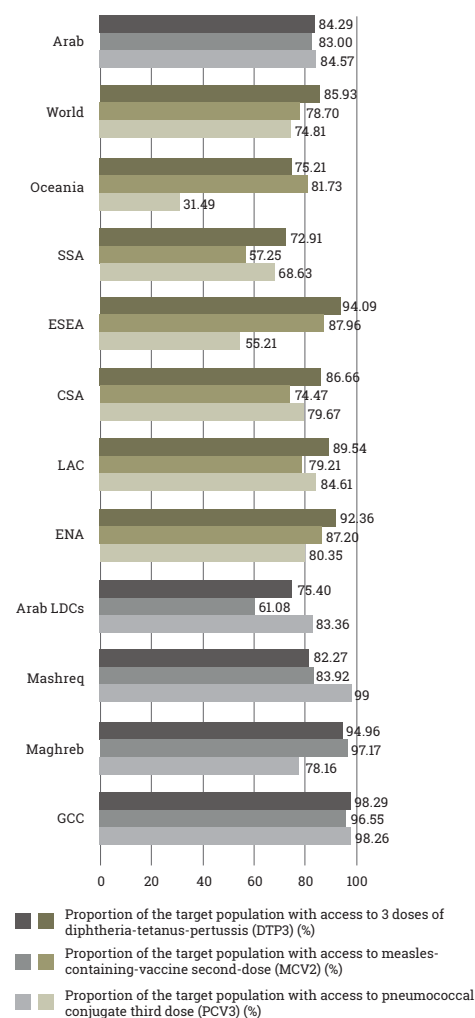
### 3.b

Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use to the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all

#### 3.b.1

Proportion of the population with access to affordable medicines and vaccines on a sustainable basis

Figure 21 Proportion of the target population with access to three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP3), to measles-containing-vaccine second-dose (MCV2) and to pneumococcal conjugate third dose (PCV3) (percentage)

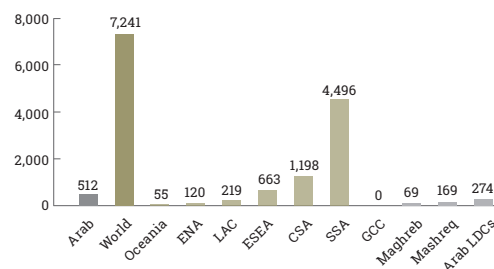


Note: All means are weighted by the total population of children aged 0–2 years (i.e., the target population and the denominator), using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) as, "The target population for given vaccine is defined based on recommended age for administration. The primary vaccination series of most vaccines are administered in the first two years of life". For DTP3, the calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2016. For MCV2, the calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries except Comoros, Mauritania and Somalia in 2016. For PCV3, the calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2016: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Kuwait, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

#### 3.b.2

Total net official development assistance to medical research and basic health sectors

Figure 22 Total official development assistance to medical research and basic health sectors (net disbursements, in millions of constant 2016 United States dollars)



Note: Indicator 3.b.2 only covers recipient countries/territories and excludes the 33 donor countries/territories listed by the OECD. Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of following Arab countries in 2016: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

**3.b.3**

Proportion of health facilities that have a core set of relevant essential medicines available and affordable on a sustainable basis

**3.c**

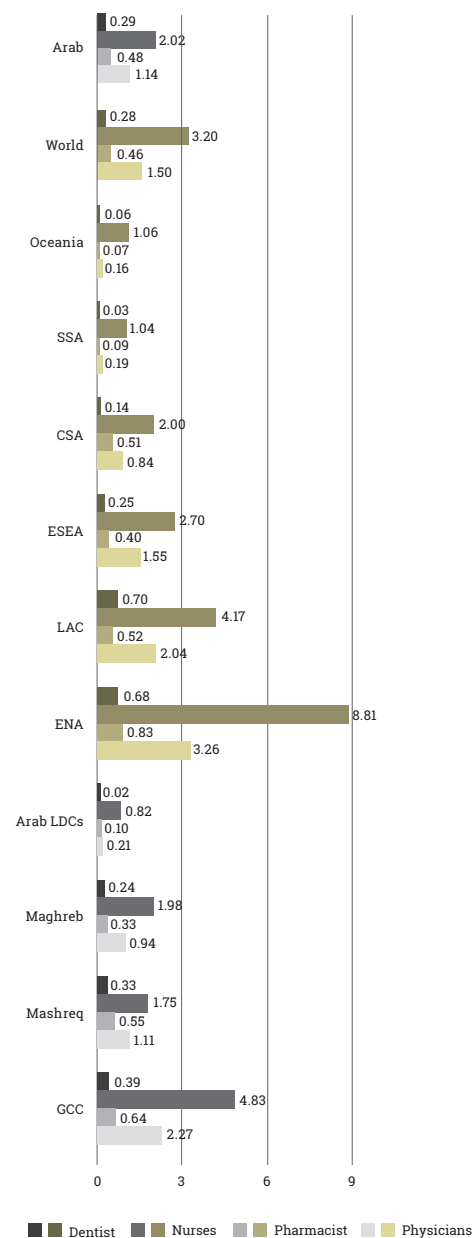
Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States

**3.c.1**

Health worker density and distribution

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Figure 23 Health worker density of dentists, nurses, pharmacists and physicians (index, per 1,000 population)



Note: All means are population weighted using 2014 population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years as follows:

Dentists: Mauritania (2009), Tunisia (2010), Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2014), Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait (2015) and Oman (2016).

Nurses: Mauritania (2009), Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2014), Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait (2015), Oman and Tunisia (2016).

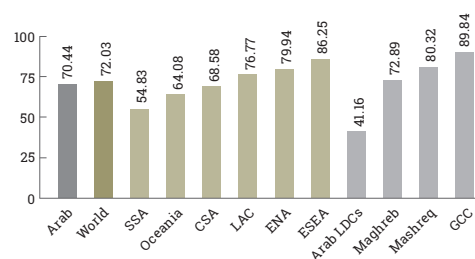
Pharmacists: Mauritania and Morocco (2009), Tunisia (2010), Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2014), Bahrain and Jordan (2015) and Oman (2016).

Physicians: Mauritania (2009), Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2014), Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait and Tunisia (2015) and Oman (2016).

### 3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks

#### 3.d.1 International Health Regulations (IHR) capacity and health emergency preparedness

Figure 24 Average of 13 International Health Regulations core capacities (percentage)

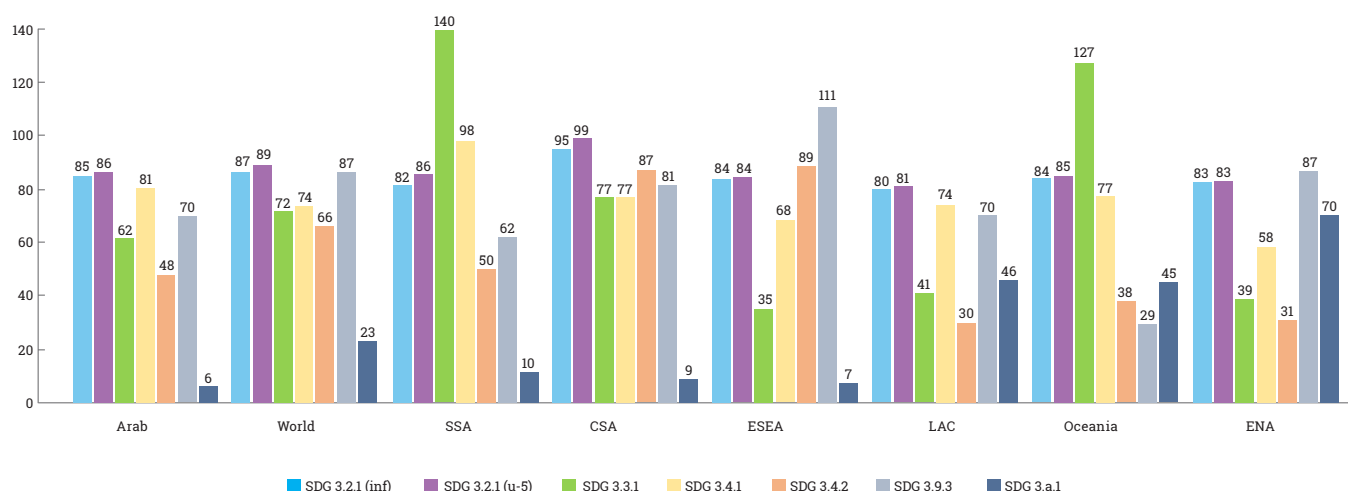


Note: Aggregates are the simple means of country values, since this is a State-level indicator (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2017.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019c) for the following indicators: 3.1.1 [Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)], 3.2.1 [Under-5 mortality rate and Infant mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)], 3.2.2 [Neonatal mortality rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)], 3.3.1 [Number of new HIV infections per 1,000 uninfected population], 3.3.3 [Malaria incidence per 1,000 population at risk] and 3.3.5 [Number of people requiring interventions against neglected tropical diseases].

Figure 25 Gender inequality in terms of SDG indicators 3.3.1, 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 3.9.3 and 3.a.1, and two series of 3.2.1, female-to-male ratio



Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All means of these ratios are weighted by the same weighting variables used for their corresponding series. For ratios of SDG 3.2.1 (infant mortality and under5- mortality): All means are weighted by the total number of births in 2011 taken from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b. For the ratios of SDG 3.3.1, SDG 3.4.1, SDG 3.4.2, and SDG 3.9.3: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). For the ratio of SDG 3.a.1: All means are weighted by total population aged 15 years and above, using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). To a slight degree, data availability was negatively affected by weighting.



## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
2. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
3. Calculated by ESCWA based on figures 3 and 4.
4. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 4.
5. ESCWA, 2018.
6. Calculated by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean based on data from WHO, 2018b.
7. Calculated by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean based on data from WHO EMRO, 2019b.
8. WHO EMRO, 2019b.
9. Federal Health Ministry of Sudan, Sudan Health Observatory, 2018; Federal Health Ministry of Sudan, Directorate General of Human Resources for Health Development, 2012; WHO EMRO, 2019a.
10. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 16. For country level data, please refer to the annex complementing this report.
11. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 15.
12. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 14.
13. World Bank, 2013.
14. WHO, 2016.
15. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 20.
16. Calculated by ESCWA, Figure 20 (indicator 3.a.1)
17. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 13.
18. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 5.
19. UNAIDS, 2019.
20. Mokdad and others, 2016. The statement pertains to the Eastern Mediterranean region as defined by the WHO (including Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Sudan, the State of Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen, in addition to non-Arab countries, namely Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan).
21. Refer to the targets and indicators of SDG 16.
22. The latest data available from WHO, 2019d are 2015 for Egypt, 2014 for Morocco and 2013 for Tunisia.
23. United Nations, 2014.
24. For more details on country values, please refer to the annex complementing this report.
25. WHO, 2019a.
26. WHO, 2018a.
27. Ministry of Health and Population (Egypt), El-Zanaty and Associates and ICF International, 2015.
28. WHO EMRO, 2019b.
29. WHO and IBRD, 2017; WHO EMRO, 2019b.
30. WHO EMRO, 2019b.
31. Ibid.
32. WHO, 2019c.
33. Al-Mandhari and others, 2020.
34. Based on Sharara and others, 2018.
35. World Bank, 2013.
36. WHO EMRO, 2019b; WHO and IBRD, 2017.
37. Charlson and others, 2019.
38. World Bank, 2013.
39. For country data, refer to the annex complementing this report.
40. For country data, refer to the annex complementing this report (indicator 3.8.1).

41. For more information on country figures, please refer to the annex complementing this report (indicator 3.c.1).
42. DeJong and others, 2017.
43. See for example Baroud, 2017.
44. Obermeyer, Bott and Sassine, 2015.
45. DeJong and Battistin, 2015.
46. UNAIDS, 2012.
47. WHO, 2013; UN Women 2018. This statement covers four Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, State of Palestine) as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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## SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Despite expanding enrolment and increased investment, education is falling short of its transformative potential in the Arab region. The main challenges are weak quality, outdated teaching and learning methods, and inequitable access and infrastructure. Without re-envisioning education as a societal project to produce critical and innovative thinkers and citizens, the region will not be able to harness education’s lifelong potential as articulated in SDG 4. This new vision is crucial to achieve sustainable development; spread values of equality, justice and peace; and enhance the employability of youth.

### Key facts

#### > 16 million children

More than 16 million children in the region are out of school, including 10 per cent of primary school-aged children and 32 per cent of upper secondary-aged children.<sup>1</sup>

#### < 40% finish upper secondary school

Around 84 per cent of students complete primary school but less than 40 per cent finish upper secondary school.<sup>2</sup>



By 2018, 489 schools in Libya and around 2,000 schools in Yemen had been damaged or destroyed by conflict, or were sheltering displaced persons or being used for military purposes. In Mosul in 2017, 74,000 out of 141,000 school-age children could not access any form of education. By 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic had lost more than one third of personnel in its education system, an estimated 140,000 people, including teachers.<sup>3</sup>

#### IRLS

The International Reading Literacy Study (IRLS), which assesses the proficiency of students in grade 4, shows some countries improving, such as Morocco, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Others lag behind. There are also differences within countries between public and private educational institutions.<sup>4</sup>

**50%**

The proportion of students completing lower secondary school with a minimum proficiency in mathematics is below 50 per cent, far from the global SDG target and less than the world average.<sup>5</sup>

**18% NEET**

More than 18 per cent of Arab youth are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The rate is 10 per cent for men and 27 per cent for women.<sup>6</sup>



The youth literacy rate is estimated at 90 per cent in the region, yet around a fifth of adults remain illiterate. The literacy rate of young women stands at 88 per cent.<sup>7</sup>



Only 47 per cent of children in the region are enrolled in one-year pre-primary education. The rate drops significantly for the least developed countries, with Djibouti and Yemen at less than 10 per cent.<sup>8</sup>



The share of young children at risk of poor development varies from 78 per cent in Djibouti to 55 per cent in Yemen, 23 per cent in Egypt and 15 per cent in Morocco.<sup>9</sup>

1/3

The quality of technical and vocational education and training remains low. Only a third of graduates are equipped for the labour market.<sup>10</sup>



In Bahrain and Qatar, 100 per cent of primary schools have access to the Internet for pedagogical purposes, compared to less than 40 per cent in the State of Palestine. No data exist for the least developed countries. The gap is slightly narrower for secondary schools.<sup>14</sup>

5.4%

An additional year of schooling adds around 5.4 per cent to earnings in Arab countries, compared to the world average of 7 per cent.<sup>11</sup>



Corporal punishment in schools is not prohibited in nine countries.<sup>12</sup> More than 1 in 4 adolescents (aged 13 to 15) report being bullied in school.<sup>13</sup>

31.2%

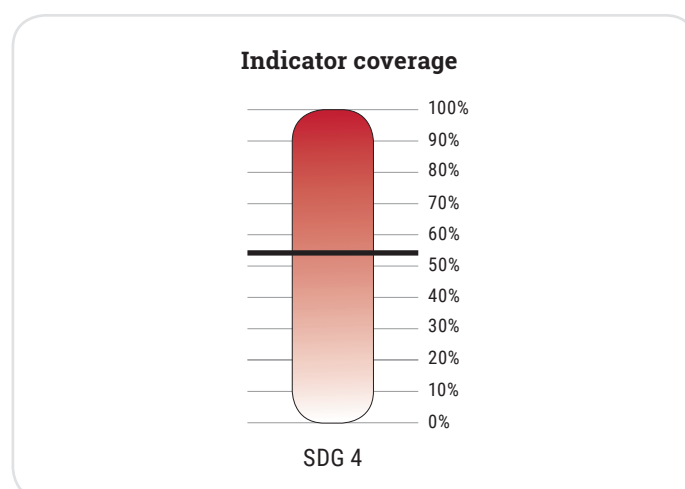
Literacy rates are lower for persons with disabilities across the region. In Oman, for example, 87 per cent of persons without disabilities are literate compared to only 31.2 per cent of persons with disabilities.<sup>15</sup>

## Measuring SDG 4 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 6 out of 11 indicators, covering 6 out of 10 targets under SDG 4.

The challenges in measuring SDG 4 in the region are mainly due to limited data collection as well as the nature of the indicators. Many indicators are new conceptually, still under study and/or have a wide scope and multiple disaggregation variables.

While many indicators are disaggregated by sex, some are disaggregated according to other variables such as disability, household income and location. The current lack of disaggregated data in the Arab region limits the ability to assess different dimensions of inclusiveness, however. More countries need to report on all indicator components to generate representative regional averages. In addition, the global indicators adopted for SDG 4 do not reflect its transformative potential as articulated in the goal and in target 4.7. Indicators do not capture the affordability of education as indicated in target 4.1. This is critical in the Arab region where there are large disparities between public and private schooling, and where most



families spend substantially on education. Indicators also fall short of measuring the quality of education and the extent to which education contributes to building inclusive and equitable societies (target 4.7). These limitations in the global framework are amplified by the region's lack of data and data disaggregation.

**Target 4.a** aims to “build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.” Indicator (4.a.1) aims to measure the “Proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)”.

The indicator does not address the ways in which teaching and learning could enhance gender equality and the inclusion of students from different social groups. Further, in the Arab region, the element most commonly reported on is access to electricity, which does not address elements articulated in the target relating to inclusion and safe, non-violent spaces.

**SDG 4 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

**TARGET 4.b** - Substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States

and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

## The main barriers to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all in the Arab region

A quality education is necessary not only for social and economic well-being, but also for participation in sustainable development and transformative change at the local, national, regional and global levels. SDG 4 relates to a number of other SDGs. It emphasizes lifelong learning, inclusion and equality (SDGs 5 and 10). It advances a vision of education that produces individuals equipped for continued learning and productivity, which is linked to employment and income generation prospects (SDGs 1 and 8). It stipulates enhancing the ability of individuals and societies to understand current development challenges, access needed information and contribute to innovative solutions to challenges like water scarcity, energy efficiency and climate change (SDGs 6, 7 and 13), and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production (SDG 12), among others.

Early childhood, primary and secondary education cannot be separated from post-secondary education and the contribution of research and development (SDG 9) to better social, economic and environmental conditions. Fundamentally, inclusive and equitable quality education fosters social cohesion and encourages students and graduates to work for the common good, leading to more peaceful and just societies (SDGs 5 and 16).

The salaries of teachers in **Egypt's public schools**, where the vast majority of students are enrolled, are the lowest among public sector jobs, even as demand for public education has been increasing given a growing population. Ineffective and disengaged teaching in the classroom in most public and private schools has led to the rise of private tutoring. The phenomenon allows parents to supplement their children's education and teachers to supplement their income after school hours. This form of privatization of education has been estimated to cost up to 50 per cent of household budgets. The wealthiest quintile of the population spends 10 times more on private tutoring than the poorest.

Source: UNESCO, 2015; Assaad and Krafft, 2015; ESCWA, 2015.

Education in the Arab region is falling short of its potential. Weak quality, extreme inequality in access within and between countries and inadequate reforms are curbing the potential of generations to create better lives for themselves and lead a much-needed development transformation.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 4 IN THE ARAB REGION

#### Weak quality

Educational reform and investment in the region have been focused on quantifiable and material infrastructural changes. Notwithstanding the importance of such actions, the content that education systems deliver remains far from being transformative as envisioned under SDG 4. Curricula are limited and rarely innovative; the teaching profession is undervalued and underpaid; the humanities and social sciences are not prioritized; and learning continues to be mostly by rote at least in public schools. The emphasis on end-of-year testing devalues problem-solving and analytical skills and emphasizes the ability to reproduce information as delivered by teachers.

Thus, the system does not encourage active engagement with knowledge, nor does it prioritize quick adaptability to continuous developments in technology and industry.

While government spending on education in the region remains lower than the world average, some governments have significantly increased spending. This has not substantially transformed teaching and learning, however. The region has not yet



witnessed a broader social movement involving parents, students, educators and policymakers advocating for teaching skills that emphasize engaging with and producing knowledge, rather than simply acquiring it.<sup>16</sup>

Education in primary and secondary schools does not prepare students to transition to university, employment and innovative industries, leaving the region with high unemployment among youth, especially those who are educated. The SDG 4 vision of promoting human rights, gender equality and sustainability has not been well-integrated in curricula. Few or no resources are allocated for the continuous professional development of teachers or the adaptation of new methodologies that link learning inside the classroom to social, economic, political and environmental challenges in society at large.

### A two-tier system exacerbates inequality and hinders inclusive education



The turn away from public schooling in the region, often as a result of lower quality education in public schools and decreasing investment in them, is detrimental to the role education should play in society as whole. The privatization and commodification of education, though a solution for some, are increasing inequality. Segregation in education produces a negative impact on social cohesion (SDG 16) and exacerbates poverty and exclusion (SDGs 1 and 10).

For example, in Mauritania, the growth rate of students in private education was double the rate in the public sector between 2011–2012 and 2016–2017. Public schools are closing, and their land is being sold as the Government is short on funding. In Morocco, there has been a threefold increase in the number of students in private schools in the last 15 years, with most private schools located in urban centres.<sup>17</sup> The influence of inequalities in education can reverberate throughout a lifetime, in upper-income countries, such as those in the GCC, as well as lower-middle-income countries, such as Egypt.

### The weakness of economies limits education payoff



In tandem with weak quality of education, the structure of economies across the region has slowed rather than promoted a transformation of educational systems. Rentier economies and concentrations of low-productivity industries do not create enough jobs to absorb problem solvers and critical thinkers, or encourage innovative education and lifelong learning.

Even as youth graduate from schools across the region, they are often unable to transition to well-paying productive jobs because those are in short supply. They end up with jobs that require lower qualifications than their level of educational attainment and that pay less. At the same time, markets and production structures do not reflect any increase in productivity that translates into higher wages. Consequently, education does not pay off and contributes less than its desired impact in terms of SDG 8.

### Conflict and displacement



Amid widespread conflict and crises in the region, children in Arab countries continue to be at risk of restricted educational access, low quality, early dropouts and unsafe educational environments. The impact cuts across all dimensions of development. It will stall the achievement of other SDGs, including SDG 1, as lack of education is linked to increased poverty, and SDG 5, where uneducated and poorly educated women and girls are more likely to marry and give birth earlier.

## At risk of being left behind

The number of students out of school has significantly increased as a result of conflict. A generation of **refugee and internally displaced children** cannot access education for reasons ranging from discrimination, lack of status and official documentation, and difficulty in adapting to unfamiliar curricula and languages.<sup>18</sup> Where access is possible, financial burdens and education-related expenses such as transport prove to be major hurdles. Many refugee and internally displaced children also stay out of school in order to work and help support their families.

In some countries of the region, the **poorest children** are more likely not to attend school and they are at least four times more likely not to complete primary school compared to children in higher income groups.<sup>19</sup> Households headed by people with no education are eight times more likely to be poor than those headed by people with the highest level of education the country has to offer.<sup>20</sup>

The poor everywhere depend almost exclusively on public schools in areas where private ones may offer better quality or better options. They typically lack means to supplement formal schooling with private tutoring.

Despite increased national investment in education, many **rural communities** lack the infrastructure, physical or educational, to extend quality, inclusive and equitable education. The shortfall goes beyond the economic ability to attend private or better quality schools, which are often not available. Rural-urban differences become particularly pronounced when it comes to the probability of reaching secondary education.

In Morocco, for example, where the rural population has less access to and lower quality of education services and institutions, 26 per cent of children drop out in the last grade of primary (grade 6), compared to 1 per cent in urban areas.<sup>21</sup>

**Persons with disabilities** are particularly excluded from all education cycles, and especially post-primary education. This is more the case for girls and women with disabilities in rural areas. For example, only 1.8 per cent of girls and young women with disabilities aged 15 to 24 in rural areas of Yemen attend school.<sup>22</sup> Students with disabilities often face discriminatory social norms, poor transport and road infrastructure and inaccessible educational facilities. Teachers tend to lack training on how to accommodate diverse needs, particularly of children with cognitive disabilities.

**Young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET)** are a disquieting phenomenon in many countries, accounting for around 45 per cent of young people in Yemen, 32 per cent in the State of Palestine and 28 per cent in Egypt.<sup>23</sup> They drop out of school for different reasons and are particularly vulnerable to multiple risks. Each case should be addressed uniquely given multiple and variable drivers, but the net result is often a rise in young people's frustration, idleness and inability to integrate into formal, sustained and productive

Overall, **girls** are more likely to be out of school than boys, especially as the level of education rises—the share is 18 per cent of girls versus 12 per cent of boys at the lower secondary age. Once they make it to secondary school, however, girls are more likely to continue as boys tend to drop out to work.

While the probability of reaching secondary school is quite high for the most advantaged girls and boys in most countries; the rate for the least advantaged girls falls to 28 per cent in Yemen, 20 per cent in the Syrian Arab Republic and 12 per cent in Iraq. Intersecting inequalities place some at more disadvantages than others. For example, rural women with disabilities have a literacy rate of 6.7 per cent in Yemen and 28.4 per cent in the State of Palestine.

Source: UNICEF, 2019, p. 44; ESCWA, 2018; Assaad and others, 2019.

employment. NEET females also contend with gender biases that keep women out of education and the labour market.

At the regional level, the **least developed countries** remain the most disadvantaged and report the lowest performance indicators on universal access to education as well as literacy, gender parity and equality, and the quality of education. These countries lack the funds to develop education systems, and their economies are stuck in primary sector activities, creating few jobs and limiting demand for skilled employment.

Less than one quarter of 3- and 4-year-old children in the region are attending **early childhood education**. Inequalities have to do with the features of national education systems, gender and cultural norms (25 per cent of boys attend versus 21 per cent of girls) as well as household wealth (35 per cent of children in the richest quintile of households attend versus 13 per cent of the poorest quintile).

Source: Calculated by UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office based on UNICEF, 2017b.

Disparities are stark when it comes to youth and adults who have relevant skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship. The proportion of youth and adults with **basic ICT skills\*** is higher in Bahrain, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (60 per cent to 90 per cent) than in Egypt and Morocco (20 per cent to 50 per cent). The proportion becomes much lower in Djibouti and the Sudan (less than 20 per cent).

\* Examples of basic ICT skills are using copy/paste functionalities and sending emails.

Source: Compiled by ESCWA from United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 4

### 1. Rethink the role and value of education to drive transformative change:

- Reconsider the goals of educational systems beyond just building individual capabilities so they can support a collective endeavour for social change.
- Reform the entirety of educational systems, and reallocate resources to empower students, teachers and parents and engage them in continuous reforms.
- Guarantee and protect freedom of thought and expression to unleash the potential of research and development.
- Ensure access to lifelong learning opportunities for all, across age groups.



## 2. Invest in and continuously reform and upgrade educational systems across the region:

- Reform curricula to integrate innovative methodologies of learning and teaching that encourage critical thinking and problem-solving, and allow learners to apply knowledge throughout their lives as participants, citizens and lifelong learners.
- Reform assessment methods to focus on measuring the development of abilities rather than acquisition of information.
- Strengthen all disciplines, encourage interdisciplinarity and prioritize linkages across social sciences, humanities, sciences and more technical subjects.
- Integrate principles of sustainable development, human rights, democratic and engaged citizenship and gender equality into curricula at all levels.
- Improve teacher training and access to technology and innovative methodologies.
- Integrate early childhood education into educational strategies.

## 3. Guarantee the right to equitable and quality education:

- Ensure equitable spending on education to supplement gaps in rural and marginalized areas.
- Ensure schools are equipped (with physical and human resources) to address the needs of girls and boys alike and persons with disabilities, both physical and non-physical.
- Link educational strategies to social protection schemes to ensure children remain in school.

## 4. Improve the collection of data:

- Enhance the capacity to collect disaggregated data by sex, location, disability, income level and other markers.
- Enhance the capacity to measure the quality of education.
- Deploy modern data science for more timely feedback and relevant evidence.

# SDG 4 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

### 4.1

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

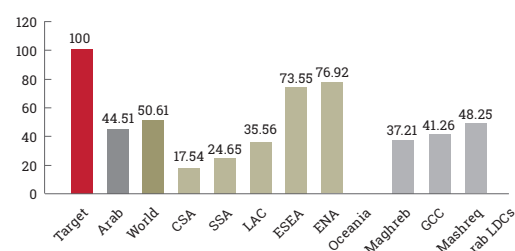
## Indicator

### 4.1.1

Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex

## Data

Figure 1 Proportion of children at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the total enrolment in lower secondary education (i.e., the denominator) for 2014, taken from UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018b. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: State of Palestine (2011), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2015).

### 4.2

By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

### 4.2.1

Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**4.2.2**  
**Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex**

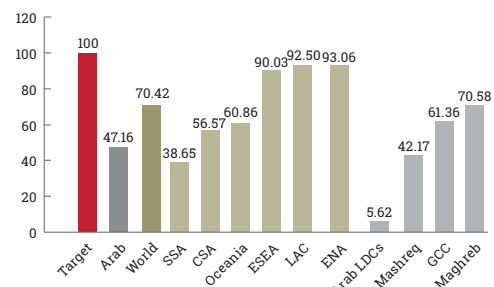
**4.3**  
 By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

**4.4**  
 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

**4.3.1**  
 Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex

**4.4.1**  
 Proportion of youth and adults with information and communications technology (ICT) skills, by type of skill

Figure 2 Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age) (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the total school-age population one year before the official primary entry age (i.e., the denominator) for 2016 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Algeria (2010), Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Yemen (2013), Comoros (2014), State of Palestine (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia (2016), Djibouti (2017).

According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), this indicator is defined as "the percentage of children in the given age range who participate in one or more organized learning programme, including programmes which offer a combination of education and care. Participation in early childhood and in primary education are both included. The age range will vary by country depending on the official age for entry to primary education".

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

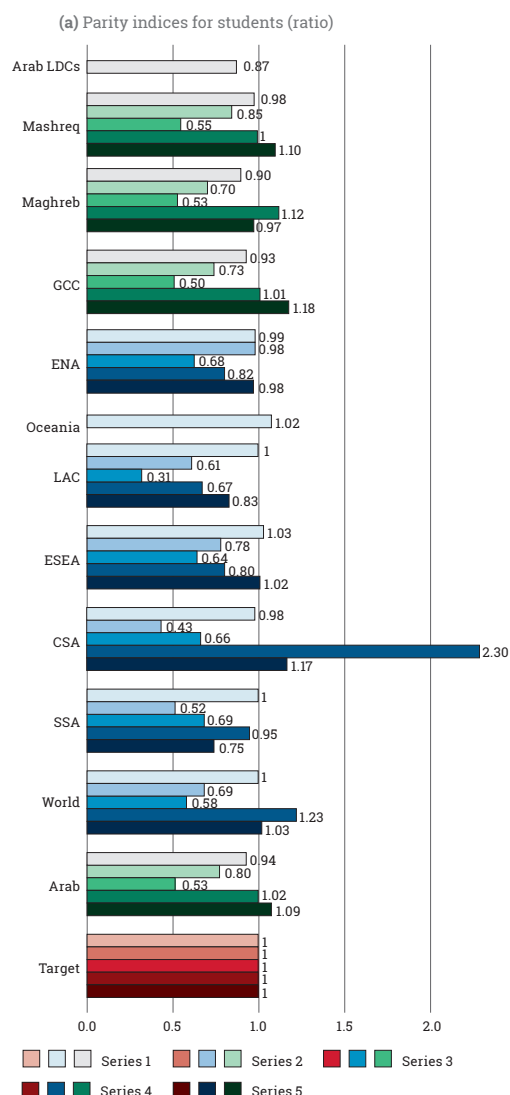
### 4.5

By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

### 4.5.1

Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated

Figure 3 Parity indices for education indicators that can be disaggregated, including five parity indices for students (a) and two parity indices for teachers (b)



Note: Series 1: Gender parity index for participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age.

Series 2: Rural-to-urban parity index for achievement in mathematics at the end of lower secondary.

Series 3: Low to high socioeconomic parity status index for achievement in mathematics at the end of lower secondary.

Series 4: Language test parity index for achievement in mathematics at the end of lower secondary.

Series 5: Gender parity index for achievement in mathematics at the end of lower secondary.

Arab regional aggregates include the data values of the following countries and years:

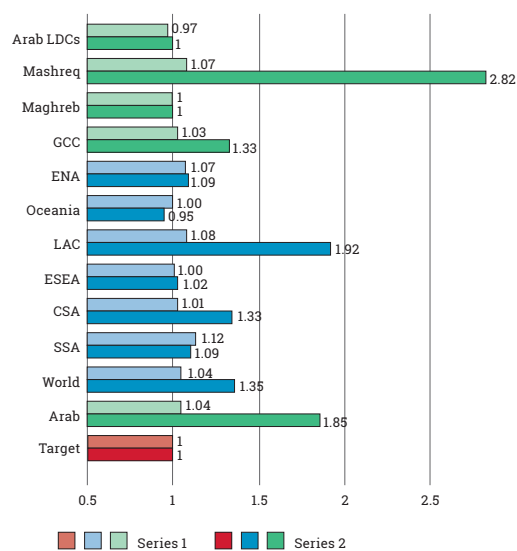
Series 2-5: State of Palestine, (2011), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2015).

Series 1: Algeria (2010), Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2013), Comoros (2014), State of Palestine (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (2016), Djibouti (2017).

All means of series 2-5 are weighted by total enrolment in lower secondary education (i.e., the denominator) in 2014 from the UNESCO database. All means series 1 are weighted by total school-age population one year before the official primary entry age (i.e., the denominator) for 2016 from UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2018b.

\*According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), "Parity indices represent the ratio of the indicator value for one group to that of the other. Typically, the likely more disadvantaged group is placed in the numerator. A value of exactly 1 indicates parity between the two groups. The further from 1 the parity index lies, the greater the disparity between the two groups of interest".

(b) Parity indices for teachers (ratio)



Note: Series 1: Gender parity index of trained teachers in primary education.

Series 2: Gender parity index of trained teachers in pre-primary education.

Arab regional aggregates include the data values of the following Arab countries and years:  
 Series 1: Qatar (2009), Algeria, Djibouti and Kuwait (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2016).  
 Series 2: Djibouti and Kuwait (2009), Jordan (2013), State of Palestine and Sudan (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Oman, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2016).

All means of series 1 are weighted by the total number of teachers in primary education (i.e., the denominator) for 2016, and all means of series 2 are weighted by the total number of teachers in pre-primary education (i.e., the denominator) for 2016 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2018b).

**4.6**  
 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

**4.6.1**  
 Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**4.7**  
 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development

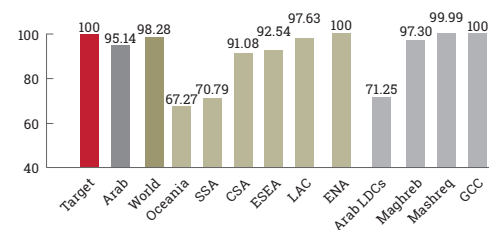
**4.7.1**  
 Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**4.a**  
Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all

**4.a.1**  
Proportion of schools with access to (a) electricity; (b) the Internet for pedagogical purposes; (c) computers for pedagogical purposes; (d) adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; (e) basic drinking water; (f) single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and (g) basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH indicator definitions)

**Figure 4** Proportion of upper secondary schools with access to electricity (percentage)

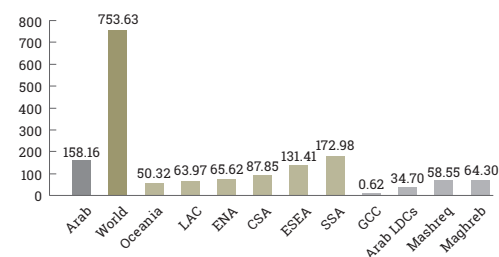


Note: All means are weighted by total GDP (current United States dollars, the denominator) for 2016, taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Jordan and Oman (2011), Sudan (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, State of Palestine and Yemen (2016), Djibouti (2017).

**4.b**  
By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

**4.b.1**  
Volume of official development assistance flows for scholarships by sector and type of study

**Figure 5** Total official flows for scholarships, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)

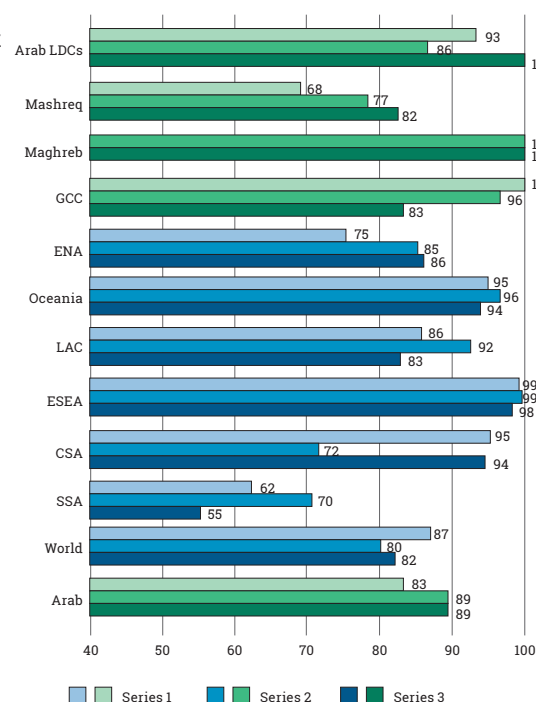


Note: This indicator only covers recipient countries and excludes the 33 donor countries from different regions that are listed by OECD. Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Oman (2010), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Yemen (2017).

**4.c**  
By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States

**4.c.1**  
Proportion of teachers in: (a) pre-primary; (b) primary; (c) lower secondary; and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country

**Figure 6** Proportion of teachers in pre-primary education, primary education and upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (percentage)



Note:

Series 1. Upper secondary  
Series 2. Primary  
Series 3. Pre-primary

All means are weighted by the total number of teachers in pre-primary, primary and secondary general education in 2016 based on UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018b).

Arab regional aggregates include the data values of the following countries and years:

Series 1: Djibouti (2009), Kuwait, Sudan (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, State of Palestine, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates (2016).

Series 2: Qatar (2009), Algeria, Djibouti, Kuwait (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates (2016).

Series 3: Yemen (2013), Saudi Arabia (2014), Djibouti (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Mauritania, State of Palestine, United Arab Emirates (2016).

**4.1, 4.2 and 4.c**

**4.1.1**  
Proportion of children at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics

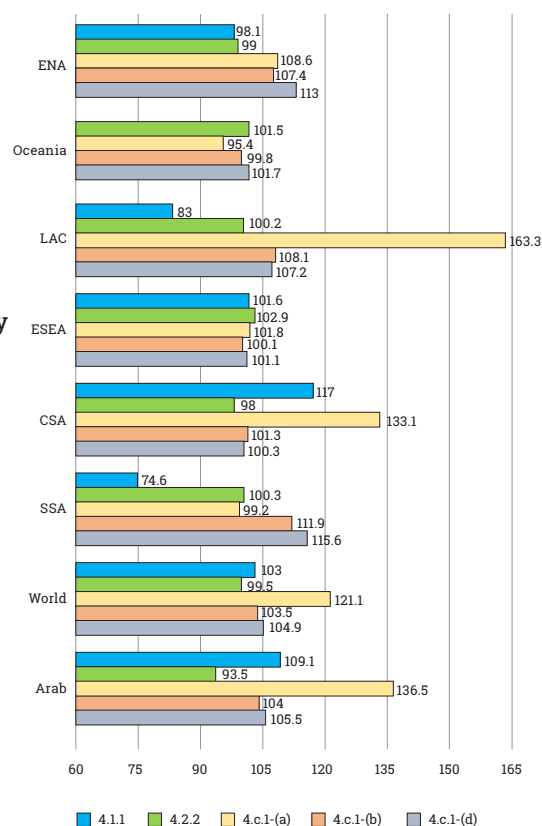
**4.2.2**  
Participation rate in organized learning, one year before the official primary entry age

**4.c.1 - (a)**  
Proportion of teachers in pre-primary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country

**4.c.1 - (b)**  
Proportion of teachers in primary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country

**4.c.1 - (d)**  
Proportion of teachers in upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country

**Figure 7** Gender inequality measured by indicators 4.1.1, 4.2.2 and three series of indicator 4.c.1 (female-to-male ratio)



Note: Data availability was slightly negatively affected by weighting. All means are weighted by the same weighting variables used for their corresponding series (UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2018b): 4.1.1 is weighted by the total enrolment in lower secondary education (i.e., the denominator) for 2014; 4.2.2 is weighted by total school-age population one year before the official primary entry age (i.e., the denominator) for 2016; 4.c.1-(a) is weighted by the total number of teachers in pre-primary education in 2016; 4.c.1-(b) is weighted by the total number of teachers in primary education in 2016; 4.c.1-(d) is weighted by the total number of teachers in secondary general education in 2016.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Source: All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) for the following indicators: 4.1.1 [Proportion of children at the end of lower secondary education achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in mathematics (percentage)], 4.5.1 [Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile, and others) for education indicators that can be disaggregated]; 4.a.1 [Proportion of schools with access to electricity in the upper secondary (percentage)], 4.b.1 [Total official flows for scholarships, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)], 4.c.1 [Proportion of teachers in upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organized teacher training (e.g., pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country (percentage)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by UNESCO based on data from UNESCO, 2018b.
2. Ibid.
3. UNOCHA 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c.
4. Mullis and others, 2017.
5. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
6. ILO, 2017.
7. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2017. This key fact refers to UNESCO's regional country groupings, as per the reference.
8. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2. For information at the country level, please refer to the annex complementing this report.
9. UNICEF and Countdown to 2030, 2019. Note: at risk in 2005, 2010 and 2015, using a composite indicator of under-5 stunting and poverty.
10. Maclean and Fien, 2017.
11. UNICEF, 2019.
12. Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2018. According to the reference, these countries are: Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syrian Arab Republic.
13. UNICEF, 2017c, 2019.
14. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018a.
15. ESCWA, 2018, p. 34.
16. UNDP, 2016; Haichour and others, 2018.
17. Association of Women Heads of Households, Coalition of Mauritanian Educational Organizations, and the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights, 2018; Aubry, 2014.
18. UNICEF Middle East and North Africa Regional Office, 2019; UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018.
19. UNICEF, 2017a.
20. ESCWA and others, 2017.
21. UNICEF and Instance Nationale d'Evaluation Conseil Supérieur de l'Education de la Formation et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2015.
22. ESCWA, 2018, p. 37.
23. UNICEF, 2019.

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**We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels. All forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys. The systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agenda is crucial.**



## SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Arab countries have made measurable progress in expanding women’s and girls’ access to health services and education. Women continue to break new ground in many areas of life. Discriminatory laws and legal practices, discriminatory social and cultural norms, and structural barriers to gender equality remain entrenched, however. Women’s economic participation is particularly behind, especially among young women. As a result, women often face constraints on their independence and full human rights, including to play an active role in decision-making, at home and in the public sphere. Women’s full political and economic participation will be critical to achieving SDG 5 and all other SDGs by 2030.

### Key facts

#### CEDAW ratification

Except for Somalia and the Sudan, all Arab States have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Comoros, Djibouti, the State of Palestine and Yemen have ratified CEDAW with no reservations on core articles. Since 2008, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Oman have withdrawn some reservations made upon ratification or accession. Although Tunisia withdrew all reservations in 2014, it maintained a general declaration not to take any regulatory or legislative decision that violates chapter 1 of the Constitution.<sup>1</sup>



Despite legal protections against child marriage, judges in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia can grant exceptions that allow children to be married. Ten Arab countries legally allow underage girls to marry with their parents’ consent.

**153**  
years

Collectively, Arab countries rank last overall globally in the World Economic Forum’s Gender Gap Report. It will take Arab and neighbouring countries an estimated 153 years to close the economic gender gap, compared to 165 years in North America, 136 years in sub-Saharan Africa and 61 years in Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

**25%**

Women’s economic participation in the Arab region is the lowest in the world at 25 per cent in 2015, compared to a world average of around 50 per cent;<sup>3</sup> 38 per cent of women workers in the region are in vulnerable employment.<sup>4</sup>

**39.3% unemployed**

Youth unemployment is high in the region, and highest among young women at 39.3 per cent on average in 2017.<sup>5</sup>

#### Mobility & autonomy

Some Arab countries retain laws that limit the mobility and autonomy of women, requiring them to secure male permission to apply for a passport, travel outside the country, work outside the home or marry.



Women’s share among agricultural holders in the region is less than 7 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Yet women are widely engaged in agricultural activities and disproportionately so in some countries, comprising around 60 per cent of such workers in Morocco and the Sudan and 54 per cent in Mauritania, for example.<sup>7</sup>

## Domestic violence 37%

An estimated 37 per cent of ever-partnered women in some countries of the region have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.<sup>8</sup> Estimates suggest that risks increase significantly in times of crisis and conflict areas.<sup>9</sup>



The majority of Arab countries distinguish between crimes and so-called “honour crimes”. For the latter, reduced sentences or mitigation measures are applied in cases where women are murdered by husbands or male family members for perceived social transgressions.<sup>10</sup>



Almost all young girls in Arab countries attend school, and in some countries, more women than men are enrolled in universities.<sup>11</sup>



The proportion of women in parliaments is on the rise, reaching 19.4 per cent in 2018; however, the average remains relatively low in the Arab region compared to other regions.<sup>14</sup>



The percentage of women in the judiciary in Arab countries is climbing but varies significantly from country to country and remains below figures for other regions. As of 2018, female judges in Lebanon held 49.3 per cent of judicial positions. In Iraq, the figure was only 7 per cent. Women judges in all Arab countries are underrepresented in high judicial offices, higher courts and judicial decision-making bodies.<sup>15</sup>



The gender gap in Internet users was 17.3 per cent in 2017, 50 per cent greater than the global gender gap.<sup>16</sup>

## STEM

In Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, 70 per cent of university students in the sciences are women. They make up only 12 per cent of the workforce in science and research-related jobs, however. In Morocco, 70 per cent of students enrolled in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) courses are women, but few achieve leadership positions in their fields after graduation.<sup>12</sup>

## FGM

In some Arab countries, female genital mutilation (FGM) persists. An estimated 98 per cent of girls and women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone FGM in Somalia, and 87 per cent in Egypt. The practice also occurs in Djibouti, Iraq, Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen.<sup>17</sup>

## 8.3% of managerial positions

The region has the lowest average globally for women in managerial positions, at 8.3 per cent in 2015, based

on the latest available country data. This compares to a global average of 27.6 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

## Measuring SDG 5 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 4 out of 14 indicators,<sup>18</sup> covering 3 out of 9 targets under SDG 5.

Measuring gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the Arab region is not limited to SDG 5 targets and indicators. Of the 232 individual indicators in the global SDG indicator framework as a whole, 53 are gender specific.<sup>19</sup>

A number of targets call for disaggregation by sex. Target 17.18, for example, refers to disaggregated data, including sex-disaggregated data, as critical in the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Indicator 1.4.2 measures the proportion of the total adult population with secure tenure rights to land. Other indicators that directly address gender equality include indicator 3.7.1 on the proportion of women of

reproductive age with access to modern methods of family planning.

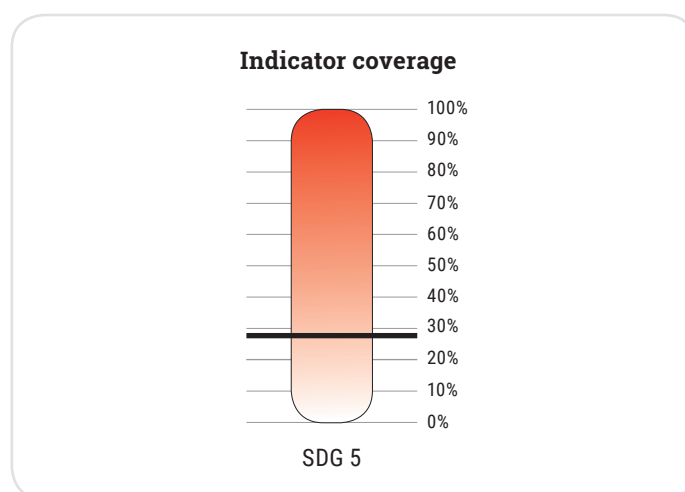
In addition to the region's longstanding difficulties in producing quality, regular and disaggregated data, measuring SDG 5 encounters further challenges.

Discrimination manifests in direct and indirect ways. Some forms, like laws, are easy to identify, and others, such as stereotypes and biased social norms, are intangible. Systematic inequalities in outcome, which often result from the intersection of different forms and levels of discrimination, are difficult to measure. They require methodological innovation and commitment from statisticians and policymakers.

National averages often conceal large inequalities among different social groups, including different groups of women and girls. Averages therefore hide inequalities related to wealth, ethnicity or geographical location.

Key indicators for SDG 5 where data are lacking or weak include indicators 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 on eliminating violence against women and girls. In collecting data, more work is needed on ethical guidelines to safeguard the dignity of respondents who provide information, and to ensure the safety of both respondents and interviewers, particularly in relation to gender-based violence.

For indicator 5.4.1, on time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, time-use surveys are invaluable in making



this issue visible in statistics, and consequently in planning and budgeting. Very little progress has been made on this front in Arab countries, however.

Measuring the political participation of women has largely focused on the representation of women in parliaments. But this measure does not reflect the efficacy of representation or the participation of women in political life outside parliaments.

Data on sexual and reproductive health are constrained to married women, given cultural and social norms. This leaves out a significant population of never-married and non-married women along with adolescent girls.

## The main barriers to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls in the Arab region

Globally and regionally, the lives of women and girls are fundamentally unequal to the lives of men and boys. In the Arab region, although the situation differs across countries, social and economic classes, and social groups, women and girls continue to face a diversity of barriers and limitations. These encompass restricted mobility, legal discrimination in personal status matters such as divorce and custody, an economic gender gap, an overwhelming burden of care and domestic work, limited participation in political life and decision-making, and vulnerability to violence, among many others. Discriminatory laws, legal practices, and cultural and social norms reinforce each other to varying degrees. In addition, conflict and crises, whether humanitarian or economic, strengthen existing discrimination as women and girls are particularly vulnerable to and bear a heavy burden in crisis situations.

Women in the Arab region have always made profound contributions to their societies, and they continue to break barriers. There are more Arab women in universities than there are Arab men. Their numbers are increasing in managerial positions, parliaments and the judiciary.

And they routinely forge ahead in multiple fields including education, business, health care, technology and the arts. Women also account for the majority of agricultural workers in many countries. Yet despite their productive roles and assertive voices, they remain significantly underrepresented in both the labour force and all levels of decision-making. Removing barriers to their full social, economic and political participation is fundamental to guaranteeing their human rights and achieving all 17 SDGs.

By and large, **feminist movements** have yet to create a grass-roots, cross-sectional popular movement at national or regional levels in Arab countries. Progress is hampered by shrinking civic space and limitations on the work of civil society generally. The situation amplifies differences and inequalities between urban and rural women, and middle-class and poorer women, and further marginalizes unemployed women, female refugees, migrant workers and in some cases women from minority groups.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 5 IN THE ARAB REGION

### Discriminatory laws and legal practices



- Weak adherence to universal human rights instruments: Almost all Arab countries (18) have made reservations to some articles of CEDAW, particularly Article 2 (discrimination in legislation) and Article 16 (marriage and family relations).<sup>20</sup> As a consequence, penal codes maintain legislation that discriminates against women. Somalia and the Sudan have yet to ratify CEDAW, while Tunisia has lifted all reservations.<sup>21</sup> Weak political commitment to universal rights enables gender-based discrimination across different areas of personal and public life, and allows States and societies wide divergence from international standards in the interpretation and enforcement of legal instruments.

In addition, the absence of legislation to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex undercuts women's participation in the workforce, and representation in political parties and governance institutions at all levels.

- Weak protection under civil law: A majority of Arab countries do not criminalize domestic violence; over 80 per cent do not criminalize marital rape.<sup>22</sup> Where laws against gender-based violence exist, they are weakly enforced. So-called "honour crimes" legitimize violence against women and even murder by male relatives for social or sexual transgressions.

The majority of Arab countries place women outside the jurisdiction of civil law and subject to personal status laws bound by religious and doctrinal jurisdiction rather than civil or secular legislation. Sharia courts as well as religious courts for non-Muslims represent different religious denominations in countries and are often organized by their respective religious authorities. These courts enjoy significant autonomy from the state's own judicial bodies.<sup>23</sup> Religious norms (both Muslim and Christian) structure "family laws" relating to marriage, divorce, custody, mobility and inheritance, often to the detriment of women.

- Lack of a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights: Despite reaffirming strong compliance with the Programme of Action of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, and the recommendations from periodic regional reviews of both frameworks, Arab countries still face challenges in granting access to sexual and reproductive health care for all, without discrimination based on sex, nationality, displacement status or marital status. Services related to maternal health, family planning, and the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS are not fully integrated within primary health care. Accessibility and quality vary across countries, among social classes and from urban to rural areas.

Legal frameworks do not reflect a rights-based approach that promotes well-informed individual choices, and they often stipulate exemptions from the legal age to marry, forcing young girls into marriage, early pregnancy and sometimes forced abortion. Cultural barriers significantly prevent women and couples from deciding freely and responsibly on their sexual and reproductive health, including family planning.

### Discriminatory social norms and behaviours



In the Arab region, as in all others, a variety of social norms and behaviours undervalue the role of women and their contributions to society, or place limits on the scope of their contributions. This constrains women's rights, agency and ability to make choices, and impedes their participation in society and the economy. Chief among these norms and behaviours are:

- Social systems of male guardianship in some Arab countries require women to defer to males in the family on life choices and/or engagement in public life.
- Socially tolerated harassment in the public sphere and gender-based violence in the private sphere are both glaring violations of the human rights of women and girls. Gender-based violence is not only prevalent due to social and cultural norms but also remains largely underreported, impeding legal attempts (where they exist) to protect women.
- Segregation of occupations by gender occurs according to what is perceived as "appropriate" or socially acceptable.
- The burden of unpaid domestic care work falls heavily on women and girls, including working women and girls enrolled in school who perform the overwhelming share of household chores. This constrains their time and ability to pursue schooling, employment, career-building and participation in public life.

### Structural barriers to women's economic participation and limited access to economic resources



Women's economic participation in the region is the lowest globally. Economic dependence curtails women's abilities to make choices and control different aspects of their lives.

In addition to the limitations imposed by discriminatory social norms, the labour market penalizes women by default as economies are geared towards non-productive and service industries; women often end up with lower paying jobs and few prospects for advancement. The absence of legislation to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex and to stop harassment in the workplace are further barriers, as is the lack of affordable and safe public transport.

With the exception of Tunisia, national laws constrict equal access to land and water for women, which jeopardizes their resilience, livelihoods and economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas. In many countries, women are unable to open bank accounts for themselves or their children. Restrictions on obtaining credit hamper their economic independence as well as their contributions to the economy. Discrimination in inheritance is common, and home ownership remains predominantly male, placing divorced and single women at an extra disadvantage.

### Conflict, crises and occupation



Protracted humanitarian crises, instability and displacement in a number of Arab countries have been devastating for women and girls, including through spillover effects on countries hosting millions of refugees. Among other consequences, women and girls have suffered heightened vulnerability to:

- Rape and sexual violence
- Early marriage
- Restrictions on mobility and access to education and health services, including safe delivery and contraception

Palestinian women living under occupation also face amplified hardships. Since the beginning of the occupation, over 10,000 Palestinian women have been arrested and detained by Israeli military and security forces. Many have been imprisoned for infractions such as posting occupation-related practices on social media. They have often been subjected to sexual harassment, verbal abuse and physical assault. In addition, the mass arrests of Palestinian men increase women's social and economic hardship as they become the sole providers for their families.<sup>24</sup>

With the notable exception of the State of Palestine, in Arab States where personal status matters are adjudicated in religious courts, **female judges** are excluded.

Across the region, women remain starkly underrepresented in high judicial offices, higher courts and in judicial decision-making bodies. This is also the case in countries where female judges are present in significant numbers, challenging the notion that women's presence will naturally expand at the top as more women enter the judiciary.

Source: ESCWA, 2018.

In Saudi Arabia, recent legislative reform states that all citizens are equal in the right to work and protects from discrimination against women in employment, recruitment and job advertising. It also prohibits any discrimination in wages between men and women for equal work.<sup>(a)</sup> Despite similar reforms in some Arab countries, implementation remains the main challenge.

In addition, discriminatory legislation and practice continue to limit the participation of women in particular sectors in the Arab countries. For example, in Libya, the Labour Relations Law of 2010 states that women shall not be employed in types of work that are "unfamiliar to their nature", which are to be defined in executive rules. No rules made under this provision have been identified, however. In Egypt, ministerial decisions prohibit women from working in mining or construction. In Algeria, Article 29 of the 1990 Labour Code prohibits employing women for night work, unless a special exception has been granted.<sup>(b)</sup>

Source: (a) Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2018; (b) ESCWA and others, 2018.

2017 landmark parliamentary decisions in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia scrapped discriminatory **rape laws** that exempted a rapist from punishment if he married his victim.

Source: UN Women, 2017.

Early marriage for Syrian girls is a concern in 69 per cent of **refugee and IDP communities**.

By 2018, 83 per cent of Yemeni IDPs were women and children, and an estimated 3 million women and girls were at risk of gender-based violence.

Sources: OCHA, 2018; 2019; Care International, 2018.

## At risk of being left behind

More data on gender inequality and sex-disaggregated data are needed to capture the status of vulnerable women and girls in the region, and to design policies and programmes to meet their needs. But several broad patterns linked to the risk of being left behind are already evident.

Across different issues, geographical and urban/rural divides have emerged as factors determining the degree of inequality for women and girls. **Women from poorer rural areas** are more likely to drop out of school, be married early, give birth at an early age, engage in informal employment, suffer complications during childbirth and experience violence.

In addition, the following categories of women and girls are most at risk of being left behind:

**Survivors of gender-based violence:** Challenges in determining the prevalence of violence lead to underestimating the level of services needed to reach and assist affected women and girls.

**Women and girls with disabilities:** Among persons with disabilities, girls and women in rural areas have the lowest rates of literacy, educational attainment and school attendance.

**Women in the informal economy:** Women working in agriculture and in other informal employment are at a higher risk of exploitation and harassment, lack social

security and health insurance, and do not enjoy pension benefits.

**Migrant women workers:** Coming mostly from South Asia and Africa, women migrants work mainly as domestic workers or in industry or agriculture. They are at a high risk of abuse and exploitation. Legislative loopholes and a lack of protection mechanisms often mean that perpetrators escape prosecution.<sup>25</sup>

**Refugee women and girls:** They are sometimes a hidden population within migrants, with very little data to assess and address their needs and potential. Restricted mobility, early marriage, increased risk of violence and sexual violence, as well as regression in terms of health and education are known to be widespread for women in communities of refugees and IDPs.

In recent conflicts in the region, **minority ethnic and religious women** have been targeted by extremists for rape and sexual assault. Some of these women belong to groups that are also nomadic, making it especially challenging to identify and address their needs. The effects of this gender-based violence, some of it genocidal, will reverberate for a long time to come, impacting entire communities and generations. Special attention needs to be paid to women's psychological and physical well-being in the aftermath of conflict, and their reintegration into their communities and society at large.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 5

### 1. Strengthen the political commitment to gender equality, and introduce and strengthen legislation to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls:

- Ensure full adherence to human rights instruments, and promote the human rights of women and girls across public and private spheres and sectors.
- Ensure adequate resources and mechanisms for implementation and enforcement of human rights instruments.
- Increase the presence of women in the judiciary at all levels and in courts overseeing personal status matters such as custody and divorce.
- Build the capacity of women in representative and legislative roles, and take affirmative action to increase their presence in decision-making.

### 2. Eliminate all discrimination in women's economic participation, and strengthen women's economic independence and access to resources:

- Repeal discriminatory laws against women in the workplace, and end occupational segregation.
- Promote, through legislation, gender-sensitive workplaces in the public and private spheres, including through provisions for maternity care and equal participation in pension funds.
- Support the provision of affordable day-care across cities and communities.
- Eliminate discrimination against women in access to economic resources including land and water, and facilitate women's access to financial services.

### 3. Target social and behavioural change:

- Increase advocacy and awareness-raising through targeted and context-tailored efforts to achieve progress in all aspects of SDG 5, including innovative solutions and bottom-up approaches to engaging men and boys for gender equality.
- Enable civil society and grass-roots-level engagement on women’s rights, including in rural and remote areas, in part through partnerships and dialogue with multiple stakeholders.
- Set standards for public discourse to eliminate discriminatory language and stereotypes in public and media discourses, and across educational curricula.

### 4. Operationalize the region’s commitments to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform of Action:

- Ensure full access to quality sexual and reproductive health services for all.

- Mainstream a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health in policymaking and resource allocation, and within the health sector.
- Eliminate all harmful practices, including FGM, and strengthen advocacy campaigns for sexual and reproductive health.

### 5. Improve data and statistics to reflect the lived realities of women and girls:

- Data and statistics are critical inputs for evidence-based policies and solutions, across all targets of SDG 5. This includes violence against women and the burden of unpaid care work. Ensure that data are disaggregated by sex as well as age, location, ethnicity, religion, disability, migratory status and other markers across all of the SDGs.

### 6. Strengthen institutional capacity:

- Ensure there are adequate human and financial resources for national women’s machineries in all countries, including conflict-affected countries, so these institutions can fulfil their mandates and push for legislative and other forms of change.

## SDG 5 targets and indicators in the Arab region

Target	Indicator	Data
<p><b>5.1</b> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p>	<p><b>5.1.1</b> Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>5.2</b> Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</p>	<p><b>5.2.1</b> Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>



**5.2.2**

Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

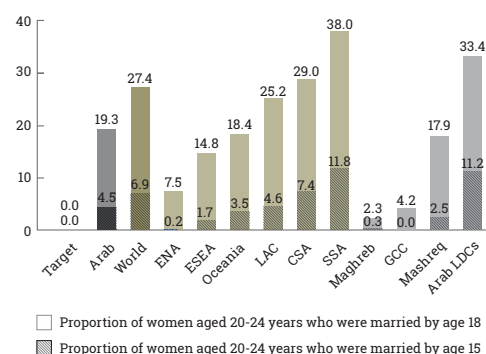
**5.3**

Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

**5.3.1**

Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18

Figure 1 Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18 (percentage)



Legend:  
 □ Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married by age 18  
 ■ Proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married by age 15

Note: We visualize these two subindicators using a stacked bar chart. Since they measure different intensities of child marriage, they are worth evaluating separately. The latter (marriage by age 18) includes the former (marriage by age 15) (more details in the annex). All means are population weighted for women aged 20 to 24 using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Lebanon (2009), Iraq (2011), Comoros, Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia (2012), Algeria and Yemen (2013), Egypt, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014) and Mauritania (2015).

**5.3.2**

Proportion of girls and women aged 15–49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, by age

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**5.4**

Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate

**5.4.1**

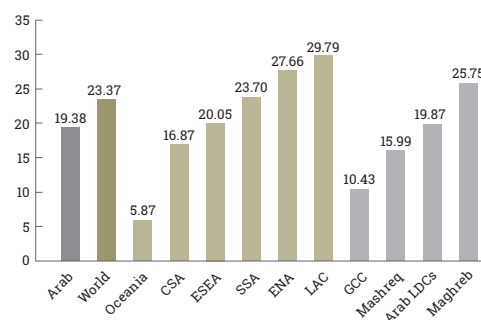
Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**5.5**  
**Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life**

**5.5.1**  
**Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments and local governments**

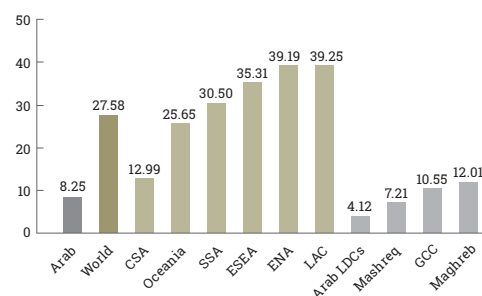
**Figure 2** Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (percentage of total number of seats)



Note: All aggregates are weighted means using 2015 values for the total number of parliamentary seats (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries except the State of Palestine in 2017.

**5.5.2**  
**Proportion of women in managerial positions**

**Figure 3** Proportion of women in managerial positions (percentage)



Note: All aggregates are weighted means using the total number of managers in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019; ILO, 2018a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2010), Tunisia (2012), Algeria and Yemen (2014), Saudi Arabia and State of Palestine (2015), Egypt, Qatar and United Arab Emirates (2016).

**5.6**  
**Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the programme of action of the international conference on population and development and the Beijing platform for action and the outcome documents of their review conferences**

**5.6.1**  
**Proportion of women aged 15–49 years who make their own informed decisions regarding sexual relations, contraceptive use and reproductive health care**

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**5.6.2**  
**Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education**

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**5.a**  
**Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws**

**5.a.1**  
**(a) Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and (b) share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure**

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**5.a.2**

Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

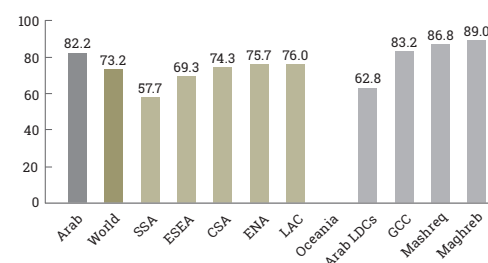
**5.b**

Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

**5.b.1**

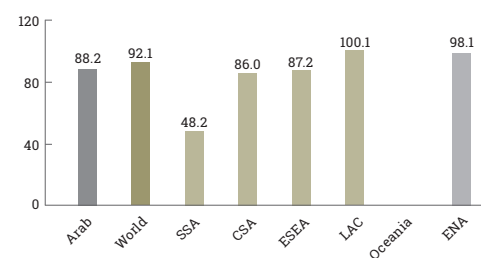
Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex

Figure 4 Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone (percentage)



Note: All means are total population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Oman (2013), State of Palestine (2014), Qatar (2015), Bahrain, Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and United Arab Emirates (2016).

Figure 5 Gender inequality in the proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone: female-to-male ratio



Note: All means of these ratios are weighted by the same weighting variable used for their corresponding series. In other words, for indicator 5.b.1, all means are total population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019).

**5.c**

Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels

**5.c.1**

Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018).

## ENDNOTES

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1. ESCWA, 2015; United Nations, 2019.
2. World Economic Forum, 2018; Zahidi, 2019.
3. ILO, 2018b; World Economic Forum, 2017.
4. Regional values calculated by UN Women based on the latest available country information from UN Women, 2015. According to the ILO, vulnerable employment includes “own-account work” and “contributing family labour”.
5. See the key facts in SDG 8.
6. Based on data from FAO, 2019b. Countries covered: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.
7. FAO, 2019a.
8. WHO, 2013; UN Women, 2018. This key fact covers four Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, State of Palestine) as well as Iran.
9. In Yemen, studies indicate that between 2016 and 2017, rates of exposure to gender-based violence increased by 36 per cent (UNFPA, 2019).
10. ESCWA and others, 2018.
11. UNDP, 2019, data are for 2013.
12. Islam, 2017.
13. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
14. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
15. ESCWA, 2018.
16. ITU, 2017.
17. Dockery, 2018. For further information, see WHO, 2018.
18. According to the methodology used in this report.
19. UN Women and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.
20. ESCWA, 2015 and 2017.
21. Ibid.
22. ESCWA and others, 2018.
23. ESCWA, 2018.
24. ESCWA, 2019.
25. ESCWA and IOM, 2017.

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## SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Freshwater scarcity is a defining challenge for the region, and is exacerbated by transboundary dependency, occupation and conflict, and climate change, as well as population growth and increased urbanization. Achieving SDG 6 requires the region to adopt a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation, along with robust water governance structures within and between countries, and strategies that link water, energy and food security. Considerable investment is needed in infrastructure, appropriate technologies, and the use of non-conventional water resources to improve productivity, sustainability and access for all.

### Key facts

#### < 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> per capita

The Arab region is among the most freshwater scarce in the world—18 out of 22 Arab States fall below the renewable freshwater resources scarcity annual threshold of 1,000 cubic metres per capita per year.<sup>1</sup>

#### 13 Arab States

fall below the absolute freshwater scarcity threshold of 500 cubic metres per capita per year.<sup>2</sup>



The Arab region is facing additional pressures on its water resources due to climate change, which manifests through increasing temperatures and generally decreasing precipitation trends.

Of the 22 Arab countries, 14 share a surface water basin with one or more riparian States.<sup>3</sup> While there are 27 transboundary surface water basins in the region, there are only a limited number of operational agreements for water cooperation.



Around 60 per cent of water in the region originates outside its borders, amplifying dependency on external water sources.

#### 40 shared aquifers

The number of shared groundwater resources in the Arab region exceeds that of shared surface water basins, with at least 40 shared aquifers present in 21 out of 22 Arab countries.<sup>4</sup>

#### 70.5 million people

It is estimated that 70.5 million people are without access to basic sanitation in the region, and 47.5 million are without access to drinking water services.<sup>5</sup>



Open defecation in the Arab region is practiced by 23.42 per cent of the population in the least developed countries compared to 3.08 per cent in the Maghreb, 0.09 per cent in the Mashreq and 0.01 per cent in the GCC countries.<sup>6</sup> Open defecation in the least developed countries is concentrated in rural areas.<sup>7</sup>



Intermittency of water supply services and variations in the quality of services are major challenges and accentuate inequalities, especially between urban and rural communities.



Access to water and sanitation services is greatly hampered due to the occupation of the State of Palestine and armed conflicts in various countries in the region.



# 80%

Agriculture consumes 80 per cent of water in the region, yet water productivity is low. Inefficient irrigation causes significant losses, estimated at around 60 per cent.<sup>8</sup>



Water pollution, due mainly to industrial waste, wastewater pollution, and unregulated use of pesticides and fertilizers, is threatening water quality and health. For example, in Gaza, the nitrate concentrations in drinking water have risen to around 600–800 mg/litre, while the maximum tolerable limit is 50 mg/litre. In the Ra's Al Jabal region in Tunisia, levels have reached around 800 mg/litre.<sup>10</sup> This poses risks for babies and the unborn fetuses of pregnant women.

## GCC

Despite being some of the most water scarce countries, GCC countries have either already achieved or are on track to achieve targets related to water supply and sanitation services through investments in non-conventional water resources.



Jordan has made significant progress in the reuse of treated wastewater, demonstrating the vast potential in the region.<sup>9</sup>



# 4%

Waterborne disease outbreaks are on the rise. In 2016, in half of the Arab States, at least 4 per cent of under-5 deaths were due to diarrhoea, with a 20 per cent rate in the Syrian Arab Republic.<sup>11</sup>

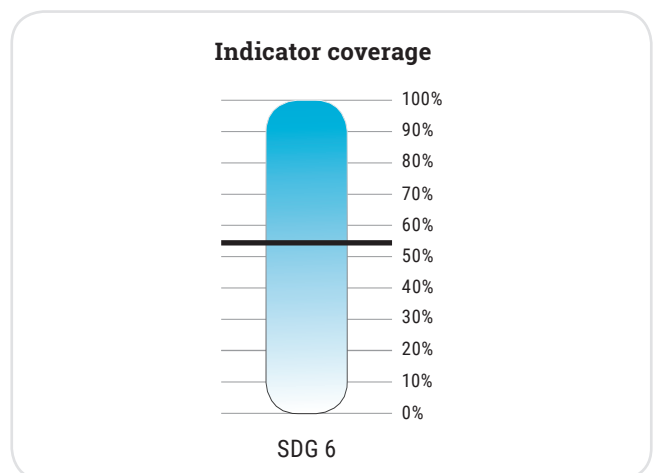
## Measuring SDG 6 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 6 out of 11 indicators,<sup>12</sup> covering 6 out of 8 targets under SDG 6.

These six targets do not include two critical ones for the Arab region: access to safe and affordable drinking water (target 6.1); and improving water quality and wastewater treatment and reuse (target 6.3). More countries need to report on all the indicator components of these targets to generate representative regional averages.

The following limitations arise in measuring SDG 6 in the Arab region using the official set of SDG indicators:

- The approved methodology for SDG 6 indicators does not require disaggregation according to rural and urban. While access to water and sanitation services is generally lower in rural areas, unplanned urbanization and slums also pose challenges, given the absence of necessary infrastructure.
- Data are not disaggregated by gender.
- Amid the spread of conflict in the region, disaggregation of data by migratory status to assess the water service needs and vulnerabilities of displaced and refugee communities remains limited.



- Global indicators for SDG 6 do not adequately capture the major challenges or opportunities for progress in the region. There are currently no indicators or globally approved methodologies to measure progress to “substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity”, as called for in SDG target 6.4. None of the SDG indicators or methodologies meaningfully reflect the importance of non-conventional water resources, such as desalination, or treated wastewater reuse to water-scarce regions or countries, such as those of the GCC.

- The indicator on the level of water stress is misleading for the State of Palestine. Under occupation, Palestinians do not have control over their natural resources, including water. Measurement of “freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources” therefore cannot be compared

to that of other countries, as access to the water that has been withdrawn depends on what the occupying authority allows. This indicator also does not include a water quality dimension, although quality is addressed in other indicators.

### The human face of SDG 6

Target 6.4 aims to substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity but has no elaborated methodology. The ability to measure the impact of water scarcity on people—and not just economic sectors—is crucial to guarantee access to water as a human right. Scarcity affects people's ability to access drinking water; stay healthy and practise hygiene; grow and produce food; produce and use energy; and preserve ecosystems critical for human well-being.

One possibility is to determine a “minimum” or “secure” amount of water required by people for basic needs, along with spatial and temporal disaggregation across subnational regions, communities, in periods of drought, etc.

**SDG 6 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

**TARGET 6.6** - Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

## The main barriers to ensuring the availability and the sustainable management of water and sanitation for all in the Arab region

Achieving SDG 6 in the Arab region is most closely interlinked with efforts to end poverty (SDG 1) and hunger (SDG 2). It is dependent on access to energy (SDG 7), influenced by climate change (SDG 13) and a key factor in determining what constitutes a slum (SDG 11) in a region where the majority of people now live in cities and urban peripheries. Access to sustainable and affordable water and sanitation services is necessary to ensure healthy lives (SDG 3), with links between water and health being particularly acute for people who are vulnerable (children, older persons, pregnant women) and economically disadvantaged in both rural and urban communities.

Given the scarcity of freshwater, there is high dependency on groundwater pumping, desalination as well as wastewater treatment; all of these approaches are energy intensive and expensive, however. The share of official development assistance allocated to the water sector needs to increase to meet the challenges posed by water scarcity and inadequate service delivery, and achieve SDG 6.

Agriculture is the biggest consumer of freshwater resources, yet water for agriculture remains a priority to ensure food security and maintain rural livelihoods in the region's middle- and low-income countries. Arab countries have yet to consolidate an approach that makes the links among water, energy and food security under

changing climate conditions. More work is needed to connect elements of efficiency, productivity, resilience and a rights-based approach in national strategies. This includes improving water productivity to ensure more crop per drop, and making a more strategic choice of crops, including by focusing on indigenous crops and/or those resilient to climate change.<sup>13</sup>

### Progress through non-conventional solutions

GCC countries have made impressive leaps in tackling water scarcity by focusing on non-conventional water resources through desalination and treatment of wastewater, among other measures. These countries produce about 60 per cent of the world's desalinated water. Associated environmental impacts need attention, however. In the coming years, GCC countries need to focus their efforts on knowledge generation and innovation to develop less energy-intensive technologies and ensure a coherent approach to water security as well as sustainable energy use.

Source: UNEP, 2019, p. 35.



## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 6 IN THE ARAB REGION

### Scarcity

Arab States are among the most water scarce in the world. High population growth rates and changing lifestyles and unsustainable production patterns are among the factors that contribute to reduced freshwater resource availability. The level of water stress, measured as freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (SDG indicator 6.4.2)<sup>14</sup> is the highest in the world, compared to other regions, and around six times higher than the world's mean. Water scarcity impacts water quantity as well as quality. This in turn leads to unequal access to water, with varying effects on affordability, quality of services and access.



### Transboundary dependency of water resources

All Arab countries, except the Comoros, share one or more of the region's 40-plus shared aquifers, and many share surface water basins as well.<sup>15</sup> This influences the governance, regulation, distribution and use of water resources, and requires a coherent approach to address scarcity and the effects of climate change. In addition, around 60 per cent of surface water comes from outside the region, with implications for water governance and transboundary water cooperation.



### Climate change

The Arab region is facing additional pressures on its water resources due to increasing temperatures and generally decreasing precipitation stemming from climate change.<sup>16</sup> Average yearly rainfall is projected to decrease by 10 per cent in the next 50 years.<sup>17</sup> Higher temperatures affect evaporation rates, and changing climate patterns are expected to increase the frequency of droughts and flash floods.



### Expanding urbanization

High population growth rates and expanding urbanization are straining service networks in formal and informal settlements. Particularly along coastlines, intensive urbanization is affecting the quantity and quality of groundwater resources through overpumping, leaving coastal populations dependent on water transfers from other river systems and basins to meet basic needs.



### Conflict and crises

Conflict and the influx of refugees have slowed progress on SDG 6 in several countries. Jordan, for example, already suffers from water scarcity. It is among those countries where a large number of refugees have placed additional pressure on the ability to extend water and wastewater services to host communities, many of which were suffering from intermittent water supplies before the refugees arrived.



## At risk of being left behind

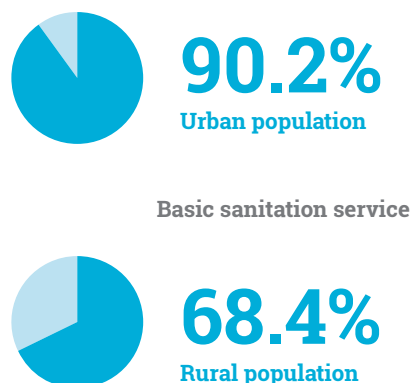
**Inhabitants of rural areas:** There is a clear discrepancy in water and sanitation services between rural and urban areas in the region, with the economically disadvantaged in both areas most likely to be left behind. Even discounting varying levels of quality and considering only access to basic services, the numbers are striking.

In 2015, 94 per cent of urban residents used a basic drinking water service compared to 77.5 per cent of rural dwellers. Further, 90.2 per cent of urban inhabitants used

a basic sanitation service compared to 68.4 per cent of rural people; 0.6 per cent of the urban population practiced open defecation compared to 14.3 per cent of the rural population.<sup>18</sup>

**Refugees and the displaced:** The human right to water and sanitation must not be affected by occupation or conflict. Refugees often lack access to safe water and proper sanitation facilities, increasing their vulnerability to illness and disease.

**Women and girls:** Available data are not sufficiently disaggregated to portray a clear gender divide in relation to SDG 6. This is in part because access to water and sanitation services is determined at the household level by consumers and the use of volumetric measures by utilities on the supply side. Adequate and gender-responsive water and sanitation services, however, directly impact issues such as the rate at which girls drop out of school. A lack of water and sanitation services in health-care facilities can increase rates of maternal morbidity and mortality, especially in rural areas. Women who face restrictions on land tenure and water rights may also encounter obstacles to food security and their ability to sustain their livelihoods through agriculture.



## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 6

### 1. Increase investment and funding:

- Infrastructure: Both foreign and domestic funding must increase for rebuilding, upgrading and scaling up water and sanitation infrastructure, especially in rural areas.
- Technology: The region needs to develop and adapt appropriate technologies for water supply, desalination and wastewater treatment and reuse, and adopt investment strategies and plans that consider the impact of climate change and associated risks.
- Improving capacities for water accounting at different levels would enhance the potential for water savings and foster the more equitable and productive reallocation of resources.

### 2. Strengthen effective and inclusive water governance, and enhance coherence and coordination across related social and economic sectors:

- Increase capacity-building efforts, in part by promoting the framework of integrated water resources management.
- Operationalize a human rights-based approach to water and sanitation to ensure the coherence of policies and actions at the national level, and to improve living conditions and well-being.
- Expand and ensure adequate access to water and sanitation services across subnational regions, in rural areas and in informal settlements.

### 3. Adopt and operationalize an integrated “nexus” approach linking water, energy and food security:

- Strategies, programmes and technologies to tackle SDG 6 need to consider the implications for livelihoods and food security as well as for energy consumption and environmental sustainability. A transformation of food systems and improved agricultural practices could increase water-use productivity in the agricultural sector.

### 4. Enhance intraregional and interregional coordination:

- Promote cooperative policy frameworks and platforms for improving shared water resources management and overcoming water scarcity.
- Improve knowledge exchange, learning and partnerships, and enhance the capacity of Arab States to negotiate shared water agreements.<sup>19</sup>

### 5. Empower stakeholders especially in rural areas:

- Build the capacity of local communities and especially farmers and women in the efficient use and effective management of the water supply. This includes the transfer of knowledge and technology as well as the harvesting of local knowledge and traditional practices for more sustainable management of water and sanitation.

# SDG 6 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

### 6.1

By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

### 6.2

By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations

## Indicator

### 6.1.1

Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services

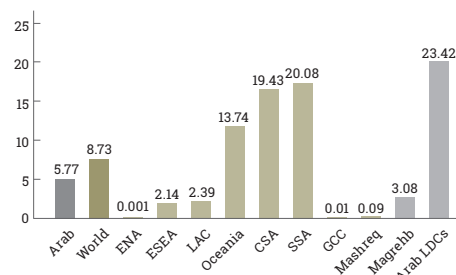
### 6.2.1

Proportion of population using (a)safely managed sanitation services, and (b) a hand-washing facility with soap and water

## Data

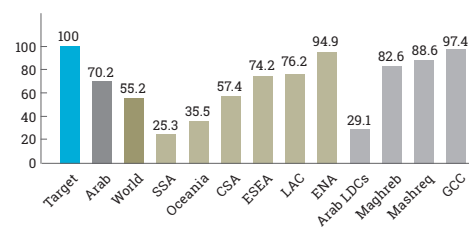
Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**Figure 1** Proportion of population practising open defecation (percentage)



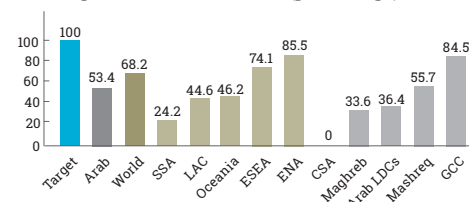
Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2017.

**Figure 2** Proportion of population with basic handwashing facilities on premises (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries: Comoros (2016), Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Mauritania, Oman, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2017).

**Figure 3** Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.

**6.3**

By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally

**6.3.1**

Proportion of wastewater safely treated

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**6.3.2**

Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**6.4**

By 2030, substantially increase water-use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity

**6.4.1**

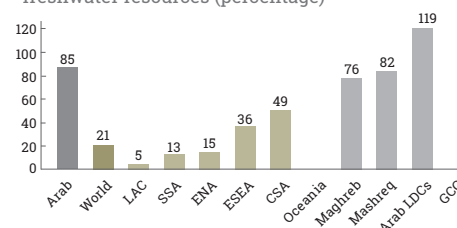
Change in water-use efficiency over time

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**6.4.2**

Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources

**Figure 4** Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted using the difference between the total renewable freshwater resources and the environmental water requirements, which consists of the denominator taken from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2016), for the latest year available. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Morocco and Sudan (2010) Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia (2015). SDG indicator 6.4.2 represents the water withdrawal intensity of countries and territories. According to the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), the indicator can be higher than 100 per cent when water withdrawal includes secondary freshwater (water withdrawn previously and returned to the system) or non-renewable water (fossil groundwater), or when annual groundwater withdrawal is higher than annual replenishment (overabstraction), or when water withdrawal includes part or all of the water set aside for environmental water requirements.

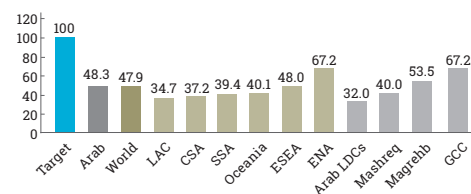
**6.5**

By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

**6.5.1**

Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (0-100)

**Figure 5** Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (percentage)



Note: Aggregates are the simple arithmetic means of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. As defined by the Global Water Partnership (2017), integrated water resources management is "a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems". As per the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), this indicator "is measured in per cent (%) from 0 (implementation not yet started) to 100 (fully implemented) and is currently being measured in terms of different stages of development and implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM)".

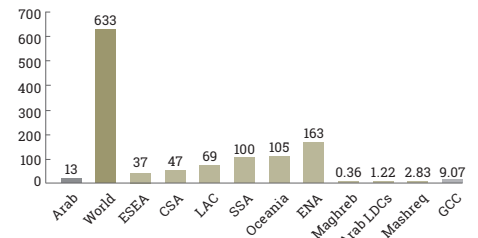
**6.5.2**  
Proportion of trans-boundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**6.6**  
By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes

**6.6.1**  
Change in the extent of water-related ecosystems over time

**Figure 6** Water body extent (permanent and maybe permanent), as a proportion of total land area (percentage)

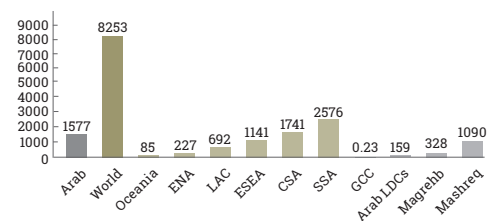


Note: Aggregates are the sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division metadata). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries but the State of Palestine in 2016.

**6.a**  
By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling and reuse technologies

**6.a.1**  
Amount of water- and sanitation-related official development assistance that is part of a government-coordinated spending plan

**Figure 7** Total official development assistance (gross disbursement) for water supply and sanitation, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)

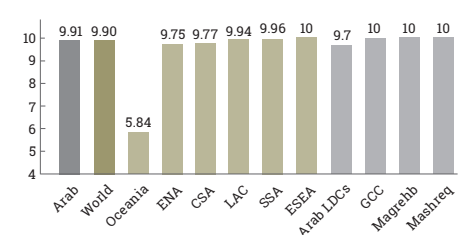


Note: Aggregates are the sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen; with 2010 data for Oman. This indicator only covers recipient countries and territories, and excludes the 33 donor countries and territories from different regions that are listed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

**6.b**  
Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

**6.b.1**  
Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management

**Figure 8** Countries with procedures in law or policy for participation by service users/communities in planning programmes for rural drinking-water supplies, by level of definition in procedures



Note: (10 = clearly defined; 5 = not clearly defined; 0 = NA) All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Egypt (2012), Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen (2014); and State of Palestine (2017). This indicator is only relevant and reported for developing countries and territories.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) in the following indicators: 6.2.1 [Proportion of population practising open defecation (percentage)], Proportion of population with basic handwashing facilities on premises (percentage), and Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services (percentage), 6.4.2 [Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (percentage)], and 6.a.1 [Total official development assistance (gross disbursement) for water supply and sanitation, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. FAO, 2016. Calculations exclude desalinated water and fossil (non-renewable) groundwater resources.
2. Ibid.
3. ESCWA, 2015a; ESCWA and BGR, 2013; International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, 2015.
4. Ibid.
5. WHO and UNICEF, 2017.
6. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
7. WHO and UNICEF, 2017.
8. ESCWA, 2015a.
9. Ibid.
10. UNDP, 2013, pp. 30, 31.
11. Data calculated by ESCWA from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-health/diarrhoeal-disease/>.
12. According to the methodology used in this report.
13. ESCWA, 2015b; ESCWA and FAO, 2017.
14. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 4.
15. ESCWA, 2015a; ESCWA and BGR, 2013; International Groundwater Resources Assessment Centre, 2015.
16. ESCWA and others, 2017.
17. Ibid.
18. WHO and UNICEF, 2018.
19. ESCWA, 2018, p. 4.

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## SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

The Arab States have made significant progress towards universal access to electricity but the least developed countries lag far behind. Rapid growth in domestic energy consumption and increased energy intensity associated with economic growth are significant challenges. Accelerating progress on SDG 7 requires a decisive policy shift to decouple economic growth and energy consumption, enhance efficiency and productivity, and increase investment in and use of clean and renewable energy. A whole-of-society transition towards sustainable energy is needed. Supporting this transformative shift in turn requires developing free and vibrant voices in the academy, media and civil society.

### Key facts

#### 90% of the population

The Arab region has done well as a whole in facilitating universal access to energy, with access to electricity reaching close to 90 per cent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

#### 36 million people lacking access

Overall, access to electricity is close to universal in cities but remains fixed at approximately 80 per cent in rural areas, with 36 million people lacking access in 2016.<sup>2</sup>

#### Arab LDCs

The least developed countries lag far behind in access to electricity, with levels below 50 per cent, and as low as 30 per cent in Somalia and 38 per cent in the Sudan.<sup>3</sup>



Many countries continue to experience service disruptions and power outages.<sup>4</sup>



The share of people using clean fuels and technologies for cooking, heating and lighting has risen continuously since the 2000s, reaching around 95 per cent in countries in the Mashreq, Maghreb and GCC in 2016; access in the least developed countries, however, lags far behind at 42 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

#### 39% of energy use for transport fuel

Energy consumption has almost tripled since 1990.<sup>6</sup> Transport fuel consumption accounts for 39 per cent of total energy use, at least 18 per cent higher than the global average.<sup>7</sup>



70% residential

In 2017, the residential and service sectors combined accounted for about two-thirds of total annual electricity consumption in the region, of which more than 70 per cent was consumed by the residential sector alone.<sup>8</sup>



3% energy intensity

While global averages have declined significantly since 1990, energy intensity in the Arab region rose during the 1990s. It has started to fall in recent years, but at a slow pace, dropping by about 3 per cent from 2010 to 2016.

#### GCC

The GCC economies are among the most energy intensive. Some of the most active countries in prioritizing energy efficiency are net importing countries, particularly Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia.<sup>9</sup>



4.1%

Renewable energy provides only 4.1 per cent of total final energy consumption in the region compared to a world average of 18 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Most of this comes from biomass, with modern technologies such as wind and solar producing marginal supplies, except in a few countries such as Morocco and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>11</sup>





## Renewable energy

The current long-term historic trend in the region is a falling share of renewables in the overall energy mix. This is due to a shift away from biomass as well as the broader use of fossil fuels to meet rapidly increasing energy demand.<sup>12</sup> Many countries have adopted national renewable energy targets, suggesting that growth in renewables could occur in the coming years.

## \$17 billion

The region's nominal share of global energy efficiency investment in 2016 was an estimated \$17 billion, about 2.7 per cent of regional gross fixed capital formation that year.<sup>13</sup>

## Measuring SDG 7 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

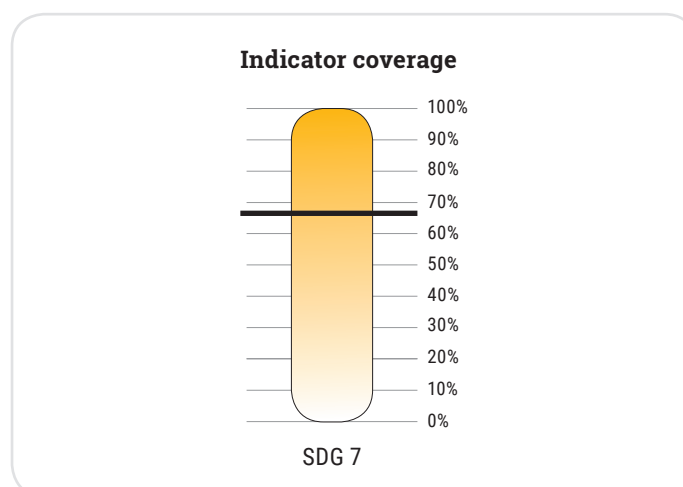
Data are available for 4 out of 6 indicators,<sup>14</sup> covering 3 out of 5 targets under SDG 7.

Several targets and indicators build on historical efforts by international agencies to harmonize and consolidate data under the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) Global Tracking Framework. This has led to relatively good data availability for three targets.

The remaining two “means of implementation” indicators lack data. They include: indicator 7.a.1, on international financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems,<sup>15</sup> and indicator 7.b.1, on investments in energy efficiency as a proportion of GDP and the amount of foreign direct investment in financial transfer for infrastructure and technology to sustainable development services. Both indicators are particularly relevant in the Arab region given significantly low levels of research and investment in renewable and clean energy as well as energy efficiency.

The following are relevant factors in measuring SDG 7 in the Arab region using the official set of SDG indicators:

- Indicator 7.1.1 on access to electricity does not capture the reliability of electricity access. Service disruption is a common feature in many countries in the region.
- The affordability of energy, which is included in the language of SDG 7, is not currently captured by the official indicators.



- Potentially complementary indicators would include investment in renewable energy and installed renewable energy capacity, per capita energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion.
- Measuring energy productivity, or the return on energy use, would mark the extent to which macroeconomic policy is transforming to achieve sustainable growth.
- Measuring achievement in relation to SDG 7 is also possible across indicators under other goals, including carbon dioxide emissions per unit of value added (under SDG 9, indicator 9.4.1), domestic material consumption (under SDGs 8 and 12, indicators 8.4.2 and 12.2.2), and fossil fuel subsidies (under SDG 12, indicator 12.c.1).

## The main barriers to ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all in the Arab region

Energy is crucial for the achievement of almost all of the SDGs, starting with its role in the eradication of poverty (SDG 1).<sup>16</sup> Interlinkages between energy and other SDGs related to food (SDG 2), water (SDG 6), economic growth and economic planning (SDG 8), industrialization (SDG 9), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), and climate change (SDG 13) are particularly important.

In the Arab region, given the critical situation of water scarcity (SDG 6) as well as the need to ensure more productive and sustainable agricultural practices (SDG 2),

applying a “water-energy-food nexus” approach is very useful. It can help optimize the complex relationships among these sectors and mitigate tensions or trade-offs. There is also a strong link to health (SDG 3) through outdoor and indoor air pollution in cities with deteriorating air quality and in areas where households lack access to clean cooking fuels. In addition to pollution, inadequate access to energy in some areas impacts the provision and quality of health services, including life-saving surgeries.

**The United Arab Emirates**, one of the world’s top exporters of net oil, is today the owner of the largest operating solar photovoltaic (PV) and concentrating solar power (CSP) plant in the world.

Masdar City is a sustainable city powered by renewable energy. Its Masdar Institute is a graduate level academic institution dedicated to research and development in sustainable energy and water technologies. The institute is also the home of the Research Center for Renewable Energy Mapping and Assessment.

Source: ESCWA, 2017b.

**The Tunisian Solar Program (PROSOL)**, a joint initiative of the Governments of Tunisia and Italy and the United Nations Environment Programme, began in 2005. It set up a dissemination mechanism, including soft loans and cost subsidies provided by the Government of Tunisia, allowing households easy access to solar technology. Consequently, solar water heating installations increased tenfold from 2005 to 2011. Over 50,000 Tunisian families now get their hot water from the sun; 42 technology suppliers have officially registered; and at least 1,000 companies have installed the systems, supporting job creation. The move has also prevented 240,000 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and reduced reliance on imported fuel.

Source: ESCWA, 2017c; United Nations, n.d.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 7 IN THE ARAB REGION

#### Lack of policies to improve energy efficiency and productivity and move away from fossil fuels

The most significant barrier to achieving SDG 7 in the region historically has been the absence of decisive and comprehensive policies to improve energy efficiency and productivity and move away from fossil fuels. The result has been largely unregulated supply and demand at the macro and micro levels. While some countries are making considerable efforts to improve efficiency and productivity, overall, Arab countries lag behind others in the world on a number of fronts linked to policy deficits, as follows:

- Policy and investment have focused on ensuring energy access in the face of rapid population growth, increasing urbanization, economic and industrial expansion and rising living standards. All of these developments have driven considerable demand for energy, which has largely been met by fossil fuels.
- High energy subsidies distort energy consumption and production patterns. Combined with a lack of energy-efficiency regulations, they have contributed to large increases in per capita electricity consumption. A number of Arab countries are taking positive steps to reform subsidy regimes. At the same time, measured and/or gradual approaches to reducing or removing subsidies are necessary given the direct impact on the poor.
- Measures that help increase energy efficiency and therefore energy productivity, particularly on the regulatory side (such as building codes, efficiency standards and labelling), have been piecemeal or poorly enforced in many parts of the region.<sup>17</sup> The scarcity of sustainable, adequate and efficient public transport systems hinders efforts to increase efficiency and productivity, and decrease energy intensity.



- Investment in energy-efficiency improvements has been limited due to the low cost of input fuels and feedstocks from domestic production of oil and natural gas. As a result, a weak market incentive to adopt modern, efficient technologies or alternative fuels, or to reduce energy consumption persists despite the rapidly declining cost of these technologies in recent years.
- Reliance on public companies to provide affordable electricity and water limits consumer choice over their electricity supply and hinders market competition. There is little incentive for public utilities to invest in more energy-efficient technologies, switch fuels or experiment with renewable technologies to drive down costs.
- Knowledge and awareness, both institutional and public, are not harnessed effectively to promote a transformative shift towards more sustainable energy supply and demand practices. Scientific research, critical media and a vibrant civil society should play a role in producing and disseminating information to inform policy and consumer choice. They are also critical in assessing policies and their economic, environmental and social impacts on consumers and the public.<sup>18</sup>

### Capacity and resources

Constraints in technical and institutional capacity, insufficient access to information and data, a dearth of skilled human resources, and the lack of mandates and resources to enforce policies and regulations are hampering efforts to integrate large quantities of intermittent renewable energy into existing energy grids, as well as to develop and implement energy-related policies and regulations.



### Access to finance

Access to finance for renewable energy projects or energy efficiency improvements remains constrained not only by weak policy support, but also by the lack of financial instruments and suitable credit markets that target such investments. Low capital market development, high capital costs, and a perceived higher risk for investors continue to constrain access to finance in the region.



## At risk of being left behind

**The region's least developed countries** continue to face a considerable gap in terms of access to electricity as well as clean fuels and technology. Around 80 per cent of the region's deficit is in the Sudan and Yemen alone. Access has improved in Mauritania since 2000.<sup>19</sup> In general, the shortfall remains a major obstacle to further socioeconomic development.

Access to electricity is almost universal in Arab cities. Yet only around 80 per cent of **rural and remote communities** have access.<sup>20</sup> This creates a noticeable rural-urban divide. For example, in Mauritania, only 2 per cent of people living in rural areas have access to electricity. The figure is 32 per cent in the Sudan.<sup>21</sup>

**Countries affected by conflict and political instability** face major obstacles to SDG 7 and may experience reversals in past progress in energy access. The Syrian Arab Republic has suffered severe and lasting damage to its ability to supply its population with energy. The destruction of oil and gas fields caused an estimated \$8.4 billion in losses by early 2016. Losses to electricity, water and sewerage installations amounted to \$8.2 billion.<sup>22</sup>

In **Yemen**, the replacement of gas with fuelwood has led to increased competition for scarce resources, resulting in further conflict between internally displaced Yemenis and their host communities. Pregnant and lactating women together with their children have been most affected by the lack of fuel, particularly those living as internally displaced people in makeshift huts and tents. Traditionally, men were responsible for collecting fuel but this responsibility has shifted primarily to women and girls. This has increased their risk of exposure to gender-based violence and has had negative health consequences, such as miscarriages from carrying heavy loads.

Source: Oxfam International, 2016.

The province of **Darfur** is one of the most impoverished parts of the Sudan. Most of the population has no access to electricity or clean fuels. The widespread use of diesel generators is highly polluting, with several consequences for human health and the environment. Solar PV provides a promising source of clean energy for remote communities.

Source: ESCWA, 2017a.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 7

Given the barriers, constraints and distorted market signals outlined above, political will and policy priority need to be given to achieving a sustainable energy transition and addressing climate change in the region. A transformation in economic planning should bridge environmental and social dimensions and intersect with a policy shift towards sustainable energy production and use.

### 1. Proactively develop integrated policymaking for sustainable energy:

- Strengthen the link between sustainable energy and social and economic development goals, the rational use of the region's fossil fuels and exploitation of the economic potential of renewable energy.
- Strengthen efforts to increase the share of renewable energy and reduce energy consumption, adopting quantitative national renewable energy and energy efficiency targets that help to measure and communicate progress, and engage stakeholders through a participatory approach.
- Enhance policy coherence through the use of complementary policies coordinated across government ministries, and strengthen analytical and institutional capacity to integrate energy policy with policies related to climate change and the water-energy-food nexus.
- Promote the use of public-private partnerships in the energy utility sector to enable private sector investment in domestic energy markets.
- Ensure that new regulatory policies, codes and standards relating to energy efficiency and productivity are enforceable, and increase institutional capacity and resource allocation to enable adequate monitoring and enforcement.

### 2. Restructure domestic energy and water pricing, and ensure complementary policies to mitigate unintended negative consequences on vulnerable groups:

- Restructure domestic pricing to reflect the full costs of energy production and use, including externalities. Energy price signals should be aligned with sustainable management of energy resources and enable accelerated uptake of energy efficiency, and renewable and clean energy technologies.

- Rationalize the use of energy subsidies by developing efficient and effective ways to protect vulnerable groups, and avoid indiscriminate direct and indirect energy subsidies that damage national budgets, distort energy markets, and severely reduce incentives for investments in sustainable energy solutions.

### 3. Enhance intraregional cooperation and trade:

- Strengthen grid interconnections between Arab countries, and promote pan-Arab integration projects and initiatives such as a pan-Arab electricity market, focusing on smart grids and green corridors.

### 4. Establish financial markets and financing solutions to drive clean energy deployment:

- Develop microcredit for small-scale applications and microgrids, or public-private partnerships and national financial instruments to incentivize international investment in large-scale applications.

### 5. Increase investment in research and development to enhance the science-policy interface:

- Empower public and private institutions to assess policies and impact, and produce the necessary knowledge to change consumption and production patterns.

# SDG 7 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

### 7.1

By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services

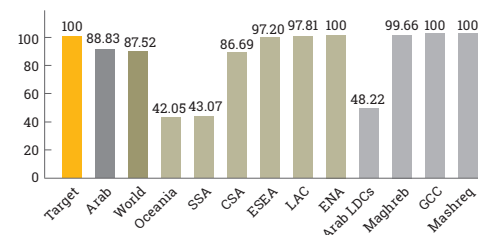
## Indicator

### 7.1.1

Proportion of population with access to electricity

## Data

**Figure 1** Proportion of population with access to electricity (percentage)

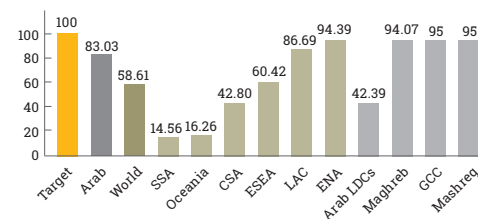


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2016.

### 7.1.2

Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology

**Figure 2** Proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2016: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. According to the SDG Indicators Metadata Repository, the proportion of the population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology is "calculated as the number of people using clean fuels and technologies for cooking, heating, and lighting divided by the total population reporting, expressed as a percentage. 'Clean' is defined by the emission rate targets and specific fuel recommendations (i.e. against unprocessed coal and kerosene) included in the normative guidance WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: household fuel combustion" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).

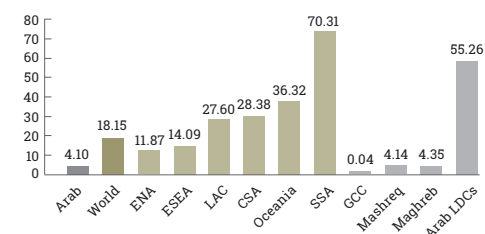
### 7.2

By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix

### 7.2.1

Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption

**Figure 3** Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption (percentage)

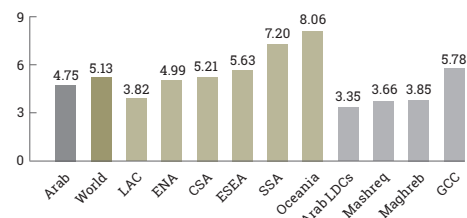


Note: All means are weighted by the total final energy consumption (TJ) (i.e., the denominator) for 2015, taken from the World Development Indicators based on original sources (national statistical offices). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2015.

**7.3**  
By 2030, double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency

**7.3.1**  
Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP

**Figure 4** Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP (megajoules per GDP in constant 2011 United States dollars, PPP)



Note: All means are weighted by constant 2011 PPP GDP in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2015, taken from the World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2015: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), "energy intensity is an indication of how much energy is used to produce one unit of economic output. It is a proxy of the efficiency with which an economy is able to use energy to produce economic output". Thus, the lower the ratio, the higher the efficiency.

**7.a**  
By 2030, enhance international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, and promote investment in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology

**7.a.1**  
International financial flows to developing countries in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**7.b**  
By 2030, expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all in developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their respective programmes of support

**7.b.1**  
Investments in energy efficiency as a proportion of GDP and the amount of foreign direct investment in financial transfer for infrastructure and technology to sustainable development services

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018).

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
2. ESCWA, 2017a.
3. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1. For more information on country-level data, refer to the annex complementing this report.
4. ESCWA, 2017a.
5. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
6. ESCWA, 2017a.
7. The region here is per the definition of UITP MENA, 2019.
8. Based on Arab Union of Electricity, 2017.
9. ESCWA, 2017a.
10. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
11. ESCWA, 2017a.
12. Ibid.
13. Estimated by ESCWA using data accessed through <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.GDI.FTOT.CD?>. For more information, see IEA, 2014.
14. According to the methodology used in this report.
15. Measurement of this indicator is set to start in 2020.
16. United Nations, 2016.
17. ESCWA, 2019, chapter 1, section B.
18. ESCWA, 2019, p. 61.
19. ESCWA, 2017a.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. ESCWA, 2016.

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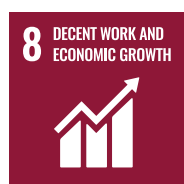




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**We will seek to build strong economic foundations for all our countries. Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity. This will only be possible if wealth is shared and income inequality is addressed. We will work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all.**

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



## SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Economic growth in the Arab States has been uneven and generally failed to meet demand for productive employment and decent work. Economic planning has been largely detached from social policies and governance structures that could increase equality and prosperity. Overdependence on oil, the dominance of low-productivity sectors and a problematic labour market further hamper efforts to move towards sustainable growth that safeguards the well-being of people and the planet. A shift in economic thinking and planning aimed at economic structural transformation is necessary for the region to move forward on SDG 8.

### Key facts

#### GDP per capita

The annual economic growth rate of real GDP per capita was -0.49 per cent in the region between 2013 and 2017, well below the world average of 3.5 per cent. The average for Arab least developed countries was -4.02 per cent, significantly beneath the global target of at least 7 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

The five-year mean in average real GDP per capita growth from 2013 to 2017 was 0.96 per cent for non-conflict Arab countries and -3.44 per cent for countries affected by conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Performance in terms of GDP per capita over the past decade has been slow or weak, with more than half the countries displaying negative trends, including all GCC countries in the last two years.<sup>3</sup>



In oil rich countries, fiscal revenues are generally concentrated in oil revenues. Economic activity in non-oil sectors often depends on oil production. Oil also accounts for the majority of the region's exports.

#### 40% of the population depends on agriculture

Agriculture has only a 7 per cent share of GDP yet it is the main source of employment and livelihoods for about 40 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup>



**-0.42%**

With the exception of the Maghreb subregion in recent years, labour productivity in the region is well below the world average. The five-year mean annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person averaged -0.42 per cent between 2013 and 2017, compared to a world average of 3.49 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

#### \$614 billion

As a result of conflict, the region has suffered an estimated net loss of \$614 billion in economic activity and an aggregate fiscal deficit of \$243 billion between 2011 and 2016.<sup>6</sup>

The overall employment-to-population ratio was 44 per cent in 2017, significantly below the world average of 58.6 per cent, primarily due to low employment rates for women and youth.<sup>7</sup>

**Only 44% employed**

#### Unemployment

The regional unemployment rate was 10.3 per cent in 2016, the highest rate in the world and almost double the world average.<sup>8</sup>



In 2017, the aggregate rate of women's unemployment was 18.9 per cent compared to 7.6 per cent for men. The labour force participation rate for women stood at 21 per cent compared to 74 per cent for men.<sup>9</sup>



The region's youth unemployment rate in 2017 was the highest in the world at 26.1 per cent, more than double the world average of 12.6 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

**39.3%** Female youth face the greatest chance of being unemployed, with an unemployment rate in 2017 of 39.3 per cent compared to 22.3 per cent for young men.<sup>11</sup>

**80%** In several countries, an estimated 80 per cent of youth work in the informal sector, concentrated in poor-quality, low-productivity work with irregular and insecure income and no access to social security.<sup>12</sup>



Different methodologies estimate informal employment in the region, excluding the agricultural sector, with estimates ranging from 45 per cent to 65 per cent. Maghreb countries have a rate of 53.5 per cent compared to 73.4 per cent in the Mashreq.<sup>13</sup>

The proportion of children engaged in economic activity is 6.1 per cent for the region but 14.8 per cent in the least developed countries. The rate is particularly high in Comoros and the Sudan.<sup>14</sup>



**40% migrant workers** The global average of migrant workers as a proportion of the total workforce is 4.2 per cent, while in the Middle East, the proportion is 40 per cent, the highest share of all global subregions.<sup>15</sup>

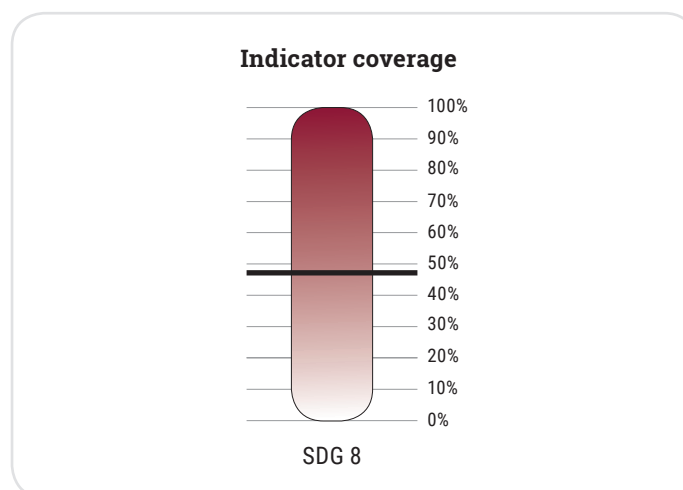
## Measuring SDG 8 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 8 out of 17 indicators,<sup>16</sup> covering 7 out of 12 targets under SDG 8.

Promoting inclusive growth and decent work for all cannot be measured mainly through GDP growth and aggregate employment figures. It is critical to adopt inclusive policies that link growth to the creation of decent jobs.

Currently, SDG 8 targets relating to decent work and inclusive labour markets are not adequately measured, given the following obstacles:

- Data are not disaggregated enough, and compliance with labour rights and international conventions is not well captured (targets 8.5 and 8.8).
- The dominant focus on GDP growth and aggregate employment figures in the region marginalizes issues of sustainability (targets 8.4 and 8.9).
- The complexities of defining informality in the economy and measuring its prevalence pose significant challenges to policymakers and practitioners in designing responsive policies.
- Measuring SDG 8 is interlinked with measuring SDG 5 on gender equality, since women's unemployment rates in the region are the highest in the world.



Measuring the amount of unpaid work done by women and girls and assessing the degree to which the labour market is conducive to female employment must be prioritized to assess progress on SDG 8.

- Target 8.6 on youth not in employment, education or training, is of high relevance to the region yet in its current formulation remains generic. More effort is needed to translate the target into more actionable and measurable objectives.

**SDG 8 CONTAINS TWO TARGETS TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

**TARGET 8.6** - Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

**TARGET 8.b** - Develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the ILO Global Jobs Pact

**SDG 8 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2025**

**TARGET 8.7** - Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

## The main barriers to achieving sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all in the Arab region

SDG 8 twins the concepts of sustainable and inclusive economic growth with decent work. The focus, therefore, is not on just increasing economic growth but on increasing sustainable and inclusive growth designed to create decent work across all segments of society. Progress on SDG 8 is necessary to create prosperous societies.

The achievement of SDG 8 has a direct impact on ending poverty (SDG 1), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), and improving livelihoods and well-being (SDGs 2, 3 and 4). Progress on education (SDG 4) is also of direct relevance to job creation policies and diversification of the economy. The increased economic participation of women has the potential to dismantle a number of other barriers to gender equality (SDG 5). SDG 8 is also interlinked with fiscal policy generally, and the ability of the State and its institutions to provide adequate and inclusive services and infrastructure (SDGs 3, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11).

**Conflict** has resulted in a rise in extreme poverty in the region, and has devastated infrastructure and resources. It has led to a net loss of an estimated \$614 billion in economic activity and an aggregate fiscal deficit of \$243 billion from 2011 to 2016.

Source: ESCWA, 2016.

In calling for sustainable economic growth, and targeting innovation and diversification and a reduced material footprint, implementation of SDG 8 must also go in tandem with implementation of Goals 9, 12, 13 and 14, and with the effective national, regional and global governance necessary to ensure coherence, sustainability, human rights and the standard of 'decency' in decent work for all (SDGs 16 and 17).

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 8 IN THE ARAB REGION

**Rentier economies and inadequate macroeconomic policies**

The region's policy direction has generally focused on increasing growth or revenue with a concentration of wealth among economic and political elites and a widening gap between the rich and poor. Investment has mostly focused on real estate or resource extraction.<sup>17</sup> Arab economies are characterized by overdependence on oil in some countries, the dominance of low productivity sectors and an underinvestment in agriculture even though the sector employs a significant share of the population in many countries.

Even periods of relatively positive growth prior to the economic downturn of 2008 did not significantly improve the incomes of the poor or generate the necessary decent work opportunities for a growing and educated labour force. Existing industries are mainly in services, generating high demand for low-skilled workers with generally low labour productivity. In the GCC countries, low-skilled workers are predominantly migrant workers; the subregion faces significant challenges in nationalizing its labour force.



### Structural challenges of the labour market



The region is not producing enough decent jobs or jobs in the formal sector. It has the highest unemployment rate in the world as well as the highest rates of unemployed women and youth. Unemployment among educated youth is particularly worrisome, signalling a disjunction between education and the labour market. Rates of informal employment are significant. An estimated 80 per cent of youth work in the informal sector where they endure precarious work, irregular and insecure income, and limited access to social security.<sup>18</sup>

While there is a mismatch between education and the needs of the labour market, insufficient labour demand remains the major challenge. The population has been growing significantly, exceeding 414 million in 2017, and accentuating the need to create more and better job opportunities. A lack of economic diversification and inactive labour market policies in most countries hinder progress, while the private sector falls short of its potential due in part to corruption and a confluence of political and economic interests that limit market competitiveness.<sup>19</sup>

Even though agriculture continues to play a large role as an employer, policies to revitalize and increase efficiency and productivity are not in place. Such policies would work in conjunction with development policies that bridge urban, peri-urban and rural divides (SDGs 2 and 11) to create better opportunities across localities.

### Weak integration into regional and global value chains



Macroeconomic policies, outdated market regulations, the absence of innovative investment strategies, inadequate transport networks and cumbersome logistical infrastructure hold back trade in the region as well as meaningful integration into global value chains. Weak industrial capacities and inadequate competitiveness are other factors. Arab countries have the lowest rate of intraregional trade in the world, and are less open to trade with the rest of the world than rapidly growing economies.<sup>20</sup>

One major challenge is limited investment in research and development. Expenditure as a proportion of GDP is 0.64 per cent in the region, significantly lower than the world average of 1.73 per cent (SDG indicator 9.5.1).<sup>21</sup> The number of researchers per 1 million inhabitants is 744, well below the world average of 1,267, and the average in Europe and North America of 3,615 (SDG indicator 9.5.2).<sup>22</sup>

Improved investment is a policy choice. It is necessary to support innovation and entrepreneurship, absorb the potential and capacities of youth, create a conducive environment for the development of new industries and integrate countries further into global value chains.

### Weak coherence between economic policies, educational strategies and the science-industry interface



While insufficient labour demand is a major barrier to achieving progress on SDG 8, other challenges stem from mismatches between supply and demand, and the difficulties youth face in the school-to-work transition. Without corrective actions, such mismatches will only intensify, especially as the region works to strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship, diversify its economies, and capitalize on opportunities for green industries and digital economies.<sup>23</sup> The current state of education, especially public education, does not support a transition to innovative research and industry.

The 18 per cent share of youth not in employment, education or training (NEET) is worrying. The rate is 10 per cent for men and 27 per cent for women.<sup>24</sup> Strategies for higher education and vocational training are not sufficiently linked to labour and economic policies, and do not prioritize the transfer and localization of knowledge. Research and development cannot be managed separately from educational reform if the goal is to encourage creativity and innovation, and the uninhibited search for knowledge.

### The arrested employment of women



Labour force participation in the Arab region is lower than the rest of the world due mainly to the lower participation of women. Though the rate has risen over the past 15 years—a growth of 10 per cent between 2011 and 2017—overall it remains very low, reaching only 21 per cent in 2017.<sup>25</sup> Young educated females comprise the largest share of working-age people who are unemployed. This arrested potential is detrimental. A 2015 study covering a number of Arab countries calculated a potential gain of \$2.7 trillion and a 47 per cent boost in GDP by 2025 if women enjoy the same economic opportunities as men.<sup>26</sup>

Morocco's recent successful insertion into the **global value chain for automobiles** exemplifies how an individual country may expand trade despite a global trade slowdown. It also indicates the untapped potential for Arab countries to participate in the international economy. To diversify its sources of growth through the development of its automobile industry, Morocco launched the Renault factory in Tangier in 2012. Since then, automobile manufacturing has grown by more than 20 per cent per year, emerging as a major driver of Morocco's exports. The anticipated start of automobile production by Peugeot Citroen should help Morocco further consolidate its position.

Source: ESCWA, 2018a.

## At risk of being left behind

High unemployment among **youth** is a significant burden not only on young people but on society as a whole. It has exacerbated income inequality, stunted social mobility and led to social discontent. In the last decade, frustrated youth, facing other challenges, including limited political participation, have been at the forefront of the Arab uprisings and calls for change. Many also choose to migrate, regularly or irregularly, and sometimes with dangerous or fatal consequences.

With high rates of unemployment and limited access to resources such as land and credit, **women** contend with very low levels of economic participation. The consequences are economic dependence privately and marginalization publicly. Women report that their inability to make independent decisions, move about freely or access safe transport as well as harassment in the workplace are the main impediments to stronger labour market participation.<sup>27</sup>

The absence or inadequacy of social protection floors in the region is a major hurdle to eliminating poverty under SDG 1 and to achieving SDG 8. **Workers in the informal and agricultural sectors** combined constitute the majority of workers in many countries, but lack job and financial security. This has implications for food security and access to education and health care. A lack of pension plans, sick leave and other provisions compounds the precariousness of their situation.

While some countries have instituted employment quota systems for persons with disabilities in both the public and private sectors, many challenges remain. The absence or weak enforcement of anti-discrimination laws that hold employers to account is one challenge. Low literacy and educational levels among **persons with disabilities** mean that many do not have the requisite skills to enter the labour market. Some social assistance

frameworks and insurance schemes tie disability benefits to the inability to work, acting as a disincentive to labour force participation. A lack of access to transport, buildings and other facilities further constrains their chances. In 9 of the 10 Arab countries for which data are available, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is no higher than 14 per cent for women and 34 per cent for men, and often much lower than that.<sup>28</sup>

**Migrant workers** in the region often lack access to basic services and rights, and are unprotected from arbitrary, exploitative or unfair working conditions. In many Arab countries, their work is mainly regulated by the *kafala* system, under which a migrant worker's immigration status is legally bound to an individual employer or sponsor for their contract period. This leaves a large margin for exploitation and abuse,<sup>29</sup> given an imbalance between the rights and abilities of workers and employers to terminate an employment relationship and be mobile in the labour market.

**Female migrant domestic workers**, mainly from Africa and Asia, are at an even higher risk, bound as they are to their employers' private homes, and in most cases they are not covered by national labour laws.

Many countries in the region have seen an influx of **refugees**. They often work illegally in the informal sector, where they have no access to social protection and are not covered by national labour laws. The rise of conflicts and instability has also placed more children in a vulnerable situation and increased the prevalence of child labour.

Source: ESCWA, 2016.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 8

Ensuring sustainable growth, enhancing productivity, creating decent jobs and increasing prosperity for all demand a structural transformation in the region's dominant economic paradigm. Further, policies must empower youth and women, end corruption and discrimination, and pave the way for a vibrant private sector and the spread of innovation and enterprise. The following can support this transformation.

### 1. Pursue fiscal and regulatory policy reform:

- Introduce a comprehensive set of macroeconomic policies and fiscal reforms to drive employment growth and generate new employment opportunities for the growing number of educated youth.
- Incentivize domestic investment and foreign direct investment in high-value-added areas.
- Make greater efforts to forge agreements between countries to foster full regional integration and increased access to global value chains.
- Lift regulatory barriers to competition to stimulate the growth of the private sector.
- Adopt measures to end corruption and increase the transparency of business dealings.

### 2. Engage in economic restructuring to develop sectors that are sustainable, inclusive and productive:

- Diversify the economy and boost investments in non-oil sectors (industry, manufacturing) that generate alternative sources of revenue, and increase the region's capacity to innovate.
- Shift to more sustainable production and industries, and capitalize on opportunities for green industry.
- Promote the creation of decent jobs in the formal private sector to enhance productivity and reduce informality.
- Invest in agriculture; enhance efficiency and productivity in line with the sustainable use of land, water and energy; and increase the transfer of knowledge and technology for more sustainable and productive agriculture.
- Boost investment in cultural industries and sustainable and heritage tourism to empower local communities.

### 3. Improve the regional ecosystem for knowledge production, research and innovation:

- Ensure quality education for all and lifelong learning in tandem with active labour market policies and diversification of the economy.
- Increase investment in research and development.
- Strengthen the links among research centres, academia and productive sectors, and promote technology transfers, especially on issues related to sustainable development.
- Establish national and regional funds to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Enhance the profile of researchers in universities, incentivize high-quality research and promote frequent science-industry dialogues as well as higher education and industry dialogues.
- Facilitate the school-to-work transition to accommodate new entries to the labour market and reduce unemployment among young people.

### 4. Eliminate limitations on the participation of women across different industries and sectors:

- Incorporate gender-based budgeting in fiscal budgets associated with legislative and institutional labour market reforms to increase female participation.
- Reform laws, including personal status laws, that discriminate against women, and address practices that hinder women's access to land, economic resources and financial services.
- Address gaps in labour laws to ensure working environments are conducive to the participation of women, and criminalize discrimination on the basis of sex as well as harassment in the workplace.
- Lift restrictions on the work of all civil society organizations, including organizations for women's rights; enable national women's machineries to effectively promote inclusive social change and counter the marginalization of women in the economy and the public sphere.

### 5. Improve labour laws and protect labour rights:

- Reform laws in line with international rights and standards, and expand legal protections.
- Improve labour migration governance by reforming the kafala system, and address discrimination against migrant workers as well as domestic workers.

# SDG 8 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

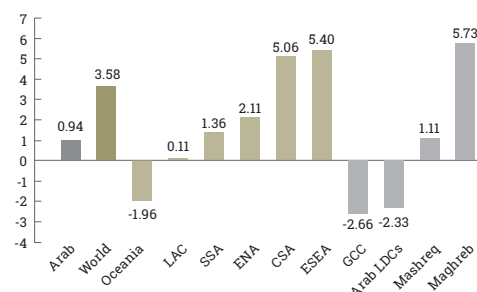
**8.1**  
Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7 per cent gross domestic product growth per annum in the least developed countries

## Indicator

**8.1.1**  
Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita

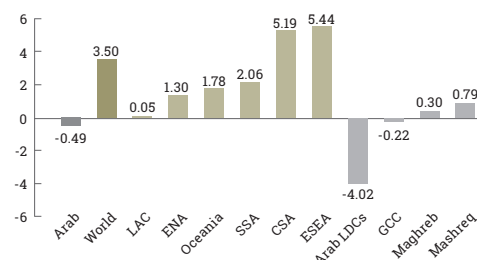
## Data

Figure 1 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017.

Figure 2 Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (percentage), five-year means, 2013–2017

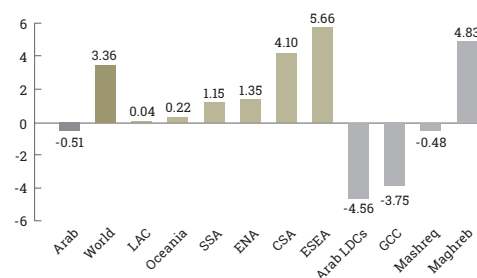


Note: All geographical means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). Country values are five year means, 2013–2017.

**8.2**  
Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors

**8.2.1**  
Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person

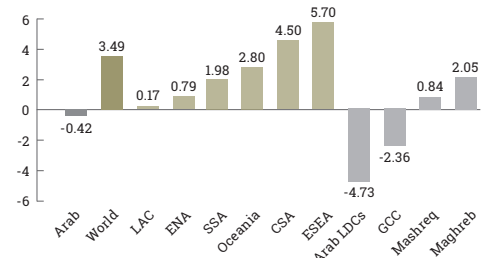
Figure 3 Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2016) total employed people (ILO, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017 except for the United Arab Emirates.



Figure 4 Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (percentage), five-year means, 2013–2017



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2016) total employed people (ILO, 2019). Country values are five year means, 2013-2017.

**8.3**

Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services

**8.3.1**

Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.4**

Improve progressively, through 2030, global resource efficiency in consumption and production and endeavor to decouple economic growth from environmental degradation, in accordance with the 10-year framework of programs on sustainable consumption and production, with developed countries taking the lead

**8.4.1**

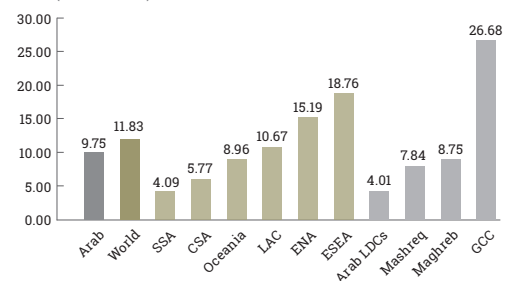
Material footprint, material footprint per capita, and material footprint per GDP

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.4.2**

Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP

Figure 5 Domestic material consumption per capita (metric tons)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries in 2017 except the State of Palestine. According to UNSTATS metadata, "Domestic Material Consumption (DMC) is a territorial (production side) indicator reporting the apparent material consumption of a national economy...DMC reports the actual amount of material in an economy...A country can, for instance, have a very high DMC because it has a large primary production sector for export or a very low DMC because it has outsourced most of the material intensive industrial process to other countries" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). This indicator is the exact repetition of SDG indicator 12.2.2.

**8.5**

By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value

**8.5.1**

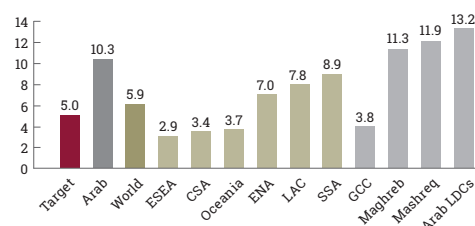
Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.5.2**

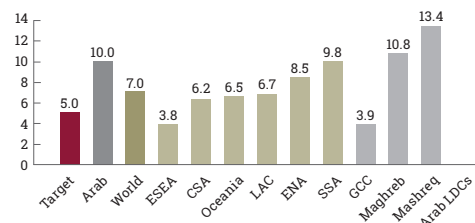
Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

Figure 6 Unemployment rate (percentage)



Note: This indicator addresses adults who are 15 years old and older. The target value (5 per cent) is set as the average natural rate of unemployment (the minimum unemployment rate possible) in the world over the last 100 years (see the annex for more details). Since there are only 117 countries covered by the ILO labour force survey from which the labour force weight comes, we use the alternative 2016 total labour force modelled estimates for construction of geographical aggregates (ILO, 2019; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Lebanon and Sudan (2009), Iraq, Kuwait and Syrian Arab Republic (2011), Libya and Bahrain (2012), Jordan and Yemen (2014), Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2016).

Figure 7 Unemployment rate (percentage), five-year means, 2013–2017



Notes: Country values are five-year means from 2013 to 2017; however, given unavailable data, this leads to 71 lost observations (9 of them among Arab States).

**8.6**

By 2020, substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training

**8.6.1**

Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

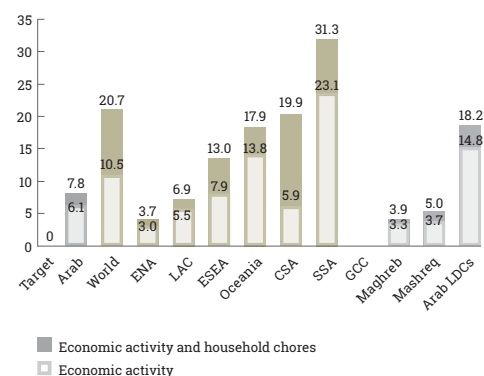
**8.7**

Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms

**8.7.1**

Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age

**Figure 8** Proportion of children engaged in economic activity, and Proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores (percentage)



Note: We visualize and analyse these two subindicators using a stacked bar chart where the "proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores" is a broader measure of the child labour problem, and actually includes the "proportion of children engaged in economic activity". Moreover, it is more informative and interesting to evaluate both subindicators than to evaluate one and omit the other (see the annex for more details). The age group covered by these two subindicators is children age 5–14 years for some observations, and children age 5–17 years for other observations. These two series together cover only 71 low- and middle-income countries globally, including nine Arab countries. Only one country from Oceania is covered; no GCC country is covered. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) estimates for the population age 5–17 years (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: State of Palestine (2010), Iraq, Mauritania and Tunisia (2011), Algeria and Comoros (2012), Egypt and Sudan (2014), Jordan (2016).

**8.8**

Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment

**8.8.1**

Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.8.2**

Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.9**

By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products

**8.9.1**

Tourism direct GDP as a proportion of total GDP and in growth rate

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**8.9.2**

Proportion of jobs in sustainable tourism industries out of total tourism jobs

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

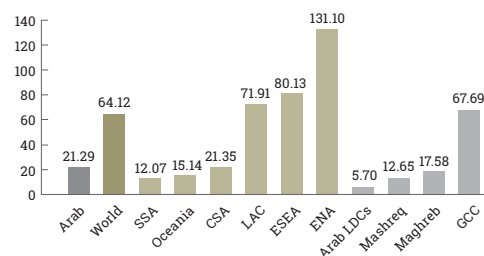
**8.10**

Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all

**8.10.1**

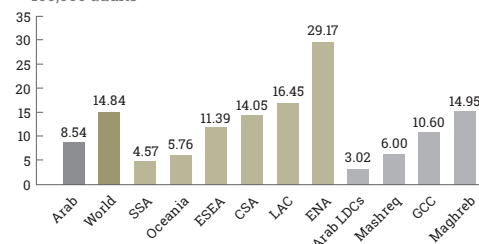
Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults and number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults

Figure 9 Number of automated teller machines (ATMs) per 100,000 adults



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest estimates for the adult population 15 years of age and older (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Libya and Syrian Arab Republic (2012), Egypt, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen (2015), Algeria Comoros, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2016).

Figure 10 Number of commercial bank branches per 100,000 adults

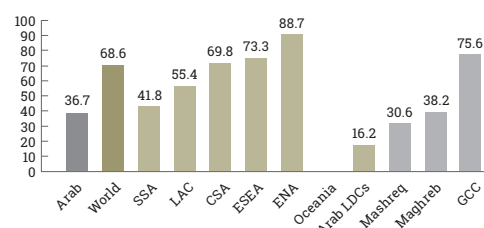


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest estimates for the adult population 15 years of age and older (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Libya (2012), Syrian Arab Republic (2013), Egypt, Sudan and Yemen (2015), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2016).

**8.10.2**

Proportion of adults (15 years and older) with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider

Figure 11 Proportion of adults with an account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest estimates for the adult population 15 years of age and older (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Djibouti, Comoros, Oman, Qatar and Syrian Arab Republic (2011), Somalia, Sudan and Yemen (2014), Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates (2017).

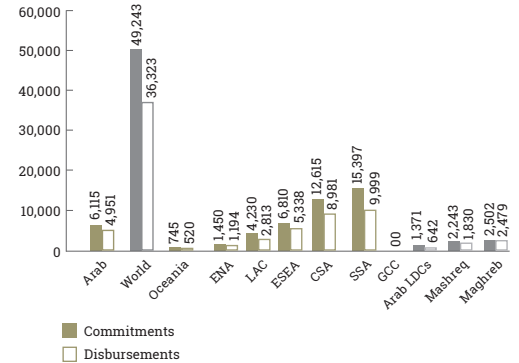
**8.a**

Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, including through the Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries

**8.a.1**

Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements

Figure 12 Total Aid for Trade commitments (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars) and total Aid for Trade disbursements (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)



Note: This indicator only covers recipient countries and excludes the 33 donor countries from different regions that are listed by the OECD and Slovenia. We visualize and analyse these two subindicators separately in order to compare the amounts of total official flows committed and the amounts of total official flows disbursed for every region/subregion (see the annex for more details). Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries in 2017: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

**8.b**

By 2020, develop and operationalize a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization

**8.b.1**

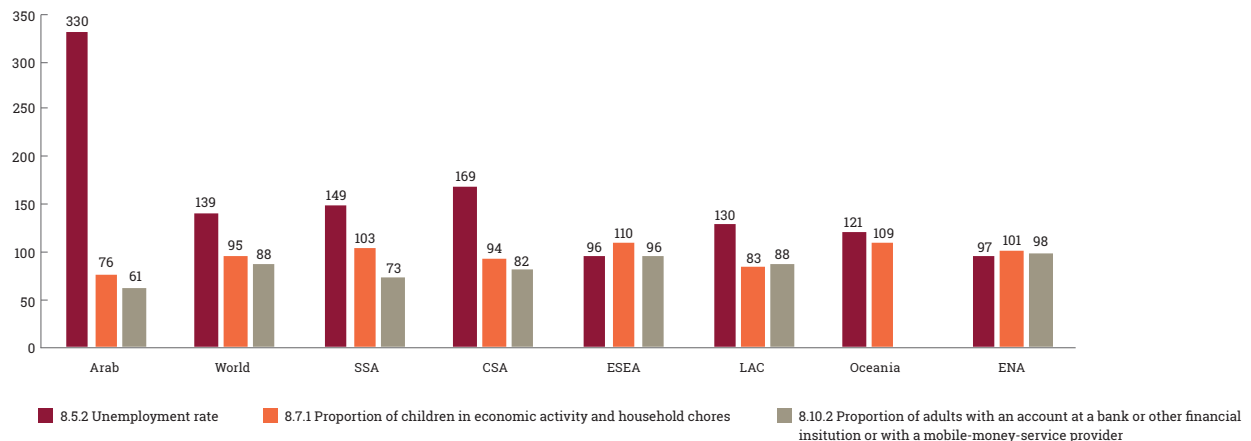
Existence of a developed and operationalized national strategy for youth employment, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) on the following indicators: 8.1.1 [Annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (percentage) and annual growth rate of real GDP per capita (percentage), five-year means 2013–2017], 8.2.1 [Annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (percentage) and annual growth rate of real GDP per employed person (percentage), five-year means, 2013–2017], 8.4.2 [Domestic material consumption per capita (metric tons)], and 8.a.1 [Total official flows committed for aid for trade (constant 2017 United States dollars, millions), and total official flows disbursed for aid for trade, by recipient (constant 2017 United States dollars, millions)].

Figure 13 Gender inequality under SDG 8 (female-to-male ratios in percentages)



Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All means of these ratios are weighted by the same weighting variables used for their corresponding series, i.e., for indicator 8.5.2, all means are population weighted using 2016 total labour force modelled estimates (ILO, 2019; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a); for indicator 8.7.1, all means are population weighted using the latest (2015) estimates for the population age 5–17 years (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a); and for indicator 8.10.2, all means are population weighted using the latest (2015) estimates for the population 15 years of age and older (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a).

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
2. Calculated by ESCWA based on United Nations Statistics Division 2019a. Conflict countries include Iraq, Libya, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. Non-conflict countries are the other 16 Arab states. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).
3. Calculated by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States based on United Nations, 2017.
4. ESCWA and FAO, 2017.
5. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 4.
6. ESCWA, 2016.
7. Calculated by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States based on ILO, 2018a.
8. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 6.
9. Calculated by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States based on ILO, 2018c.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Kabbani, 2019.
13. Chen and Harvey, 2017.
14. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 8.
15. ILO, 2018b. The regional country grouping for this statement is per the referenced report and includes: Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, State of Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.
16. According to the methodology used in this report.
17. UNDP, 2016.
18. Kabbani, 2019; Gatti and others, 2014.
19. World Economic Forum, 2018.
20. ESCWA, 2017.
21. Calculated by ESCWA; see the chapter on SDG 9.
22. Ibid.
23. ESCWA, 2019a.
24. ILO, 2017a. The regional country grouping for this statement is per the referenced report.
25. Calculated by the ILO Regional Office for Arab States based on ILO, 2017b.
26. McKinsey & Company, 2015.
27. ESCWA, 2019b.
28. ESCWA, 2018b.
29. ESCWA and IOM, 2017.

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## SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

The Arab region has yet to take comprehensive steps to shift towards sustainable and inclusive industrialization, in a context of struggling economies, rising unemployment and inefficient and unsustainable use of natural resources. Infrastructure needs are vast, especially in the least developed countries, and the region has the weakest degree of economic integration in the world. It also has the lowest levels of innovation based on investment in and the productivity of research and development (R&D). Prioritizing innovation, moving forward with regional integration and enhancing the resiliency of infrastructure demand comprehensive policy shifts and related investments and instruments. They also require political will committed to embracing the different dimensions of sustainable development, and the fundamental connectivity of systems, goods, communities and peoples across the region.

### Key facts

#### Investment in infrastructure

In 2012, the estimated investment required for reliable, robust, safe and resilient infrastructure in the Arab region was up to \$100 billion.<sup>1</sup> Increasing conflict since then has magnified the need, given the deterioration and physical destruction of roads, buildings, water networks, electricity grids and telecom networks in a number of countries. In the Syrian Arab Republic alone, by 2017, an estimated \$117.7 billion<sup>2</sup> in housing and infrastructure had been destroyed.



The ratio of public roads per 100,000 persons in the region is four times less than the world average. Railway interconnectivity is weak and, in many cases, entirely absent.<sup>3</sup>



The use of trucks to move goods across countries incurs time losses of around 57 per cent of the total journey. This is due to border crossings, control and inspection. The loss results in additional expenses of 38 per cent of the journey's original cost.<sup>4</sup>



The rate of carbon dioxide pollution from manufacturing in the region, in proportion to the value added of industry, is the worst in the world, at four times the global value.<sup>5</sup>

#### Manufacturing 9.6% of GDP

In 2017, manufacturing value added as a share of GDP was the second lowest in the world at 9.6 per cent compared to a world average of 16.4 per cent. It ranged from 0.87 per cent in Iraq to 15.65 per cent in Tunisia.<sup>6</sup>

10%

In 2017, employment in manufacturing in the region constituted 10.18 per cent of total employment.<sup>7</sup>



Since 2013, the region has doubled its ratio of gross domestic R&D expenditure to GDP. Expenditure remains around 60 per cent less than the world average, however, with sharp discrepancies among subregions.<sup>8</sup>



The regional average of full-time equivalent researchers is 744 per 1 million inhabitants, less than 60 per cent of the global average of 1,267.<sup>9</sup> The United Arab Emirates, among GCC countries, and Morocco and Tunisia, among Maghreb countries, lead the region in the number of researchers.<sup>10</sup> The share of women researchers is high in some countries, such as Bahrain at 41 per cent and Egypt at 43 per cent in 2013.<sup>11</sup>





The proportion of small-scale industries with access to a loan or credit is less than 16 per cent, considerably lower than in other regions worldwide.<sup>12</sup>



Mobile network coverage in the region exceeds the world average. The GCC countries have almost reached the 2020 target of 100 per cent of the population covered by at least a 2G network. The Arab least developed countries, however, are very far behind.<sup>16</sup>

## High-tech industry

Among the GCC countries, the proportion of medium and high-tech industry value added was 33.7 per cent in 2016, more than double the proportion in the Mashreq (15 per cent) and Maghreb (9.9 per cent). Qatar led the region at 66.9 per cent and exceeded the global average of 45.6 per cent.<sup>13</sup>



By 2018, mobile telephone penetration rates in the region had reached a saturation point of 100.2 per 100 inhabitants. From 2010 to 2018, the number of active mobile-broadband subscriptions increased almost eight times, reaching 60.2 per 100 inhabitants. The share of individuals using the Internet remains at around 50 per cent, however.<sup>17</sup>



Where data are available for middle- and low-income countries of the region, women are 20 per cent less likely than men to use the Internet on mobile

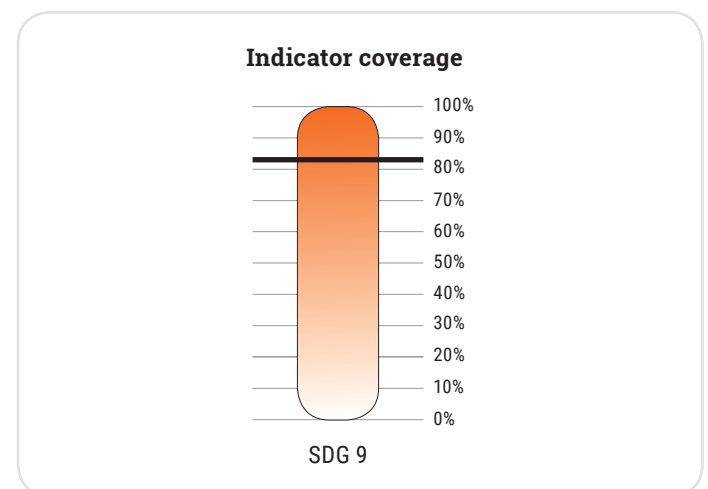
devices.<sup>14</sup> Except for Qatar, the number of women and girls using the Internet is always less than the number of men and boys.<sup>15</sup>

## Measuring SDG 9 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 10 out of 12 indicators, covering all 8 targets under SDG 9.

Despite relatively high data availability, a number of challenges pertain to the indicators globally articulated for SDG 9. These need to be addressed to allow policymakers to better guide progress towards achieving all aspects of the goal:

- SDG 9 covers infrastructure at the goal and target levels (9.1, 9.4 and 9.a) but focuses only on transportation at the indicator level. Capturing the role of infrastructure in development requires observing aspects covered by other goals, including health infrastructure (SDG 3), water infrastructure (SDG 6), energy infrastructure (SDG 7) and adapted infrastructure for students with disabilities (SDG 4). Infrastructure as an essential element of sustainable economic productivity (SDG 8) is not captured.
- Indicators under target 9.1 focus on use, affordability and access to transportation infrastructure, with no measurement of quality, reliability, sustainability or resilience. The indicators do not allow for assessments of infrastructure disruption and



losses due to disasters or of infrastructure resilience to disasters.

- Indicators related to R&D focus only on inputs such as funding and personnel. It would also be useful to look at output indicators, such as the numbers of patents and articles published, to assess the extent to which innovation has an impact at the national, regional and even global levels.

- Analysis of gender dimensions in SDG 9 indicators categorizes them as “not gender specific” or “gender blind”.<sup>18</sup> Sex-disaggregated data are necessary, however, to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact and role of SDG 9 in the Arab region.

Such data would be particularly useful in measuring indicator 9.2.2 on manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment as well as 9.5.2 on researchers.

**SDG 9 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020**

**TARGET 9.C** - Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide

universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries

## The main barriers to building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation in the Arab region

Although there are higher levels of investment in GCC countries, the Arab region generally faces overwhelming demand for new and updated infrastructure given increased population growth and urbanization, and rising inequality (SDG 10). Urban slums are a major challenge in many cities, and poor infrastructure further marginalizes entire urban and rural communities, which lack access to adequate water and sanitation services, and contend with intermittent access to electricity (SDGs 6, 7 and 11). These conditions exacerbate the impact of poverty and negatively affect human health as well as the availability and quality of health-care services (SDGs 1 and 3). Poor transport and insecure access to energy or telecommunications networks impede entrepreneurship and livelihoods, and limit employment and school enrolment in some areas, especially for girls and women (SDGs 4, 5 and 8).

Innovation is fundamental for the region to transition to increased, inclusive and sustainable industrialization. Yet efforts towards this end remain fragmented. Innovative solutions are needed across the region to close gaps in sustainability, including to raise the efficiency and productivity of land and water use, and curb food waste and loss (SDGs 6, 15 and 2). Investment in R&D has yet to reach levels necessary to strengthen the science-policy interface, build the capacities of a large unemployed youth population and absorb them into the labour force (SDGs 4, 8 and 17). Much more could be done to channel innovation to shore up defences against climate change, given the region’s vulnerability to rising temperatures, desertification and worsening pollution (SDGs 12 and 13).

The three elements of SDG 9, resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization and innovation, reinforce each other. While resilient infrastructure is necessary for sustainable industrialization, the latter will also spur investment in the former. Likewise, investment

Everyone will benefit greatly from improved infrastructure, including safer transport, enhanced water and sanitation services, and better schools and hospitals. Such improvements are often critical to reaching and reducing the vulnerabilities of **marginalized populations**, such as women and girls, older persons, persons with disabilities, and people who are poor, including in remote locations.

**Subregional discrepancies in ICT infrastructure** result in issues with seamless connectivity and speed as well as higher costs. Two GCC countries, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, have the highest penetration of “fibre to the home or building” technologies, which provide high-speed broadband Internet access. Arab least developed countries, on the other hand, are considerably behind in fixed and mobile telephony.

Source: ESCWA, 2019a.

in innovation and research can improve infrastructure and industrialization, but is predicated on resilient infrastructure. Innovation increases where industry is robust and provides incentives. The performance of the private sector, however, with its potential to drive industry and innovation and invest in infrastructure, remains uneven in the region.

The region’s slow economic growth, low productivity, high unemployment and reliance on oil and rents have put it behind on most SDG 9 targets. Two subregions face their

own additional challenges. While GCC countries have invested heavily in improving infrastructure and have highly developed systems, they have the highest carbon dioxide emissions per unit of manufacturing value added in the world, undercutting the achievement of sustainability

integral to SDG 9 and the 2030 Agenda as a whole. Meanwhile, the least developed countries lag well behind others in their levels of industrialization as well as in their ability to finance and invest in necessary infrastructure, including essential services.

**Weak regional integration** is evident in great disparities hidden within already low regional averages for infrastructure. For example, when considering freight volume by road, country figures range from 840,000 ton-kilometres in Comoros and 1 billion ton-kilometres in Djibouti to 116 billion ton-kilometres in Saudi Arabia.

Source: Compiled by ESCWA based on United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a.

**Science, technology and innovation policies** in Arab States have generally failed to catalyse knowledge production effectively or add value to products and services because they focus on developing R&D without taking the business community on board. Many Arab universities are simply not research oriented. The research activity of teaching staff in public and most private universities is in the range of 5 per cent to 10 per cent of their total academic duties, compared to 35 per cent to 50 per cent in European and American universities.

Source: UNESCO, 2015b.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 9 IN THE ARAB REGION

### The structure of economies and dominance of low-productivity sectors

While economic diversification has taken place in both oil-rich and oil-poor countries, it has not provided sufficient decent work. Labour productivity has barely budged. Economic growth has been slow, stagnant or negative, and benefits have been unevenly shared.

Currently, manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP in the region is the second lowest in the world at 9.6 per cent, compared to a world average of 16.4 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Governments (non-market services) remain the largest employers in the region, followed by agriculture in non-oil-exporting countries and market services in oil-exporting countries.

In addition, the potential of the private sector to spur and invest in industry, infrastructure and innovation, and to lead the region in the field of technology, remains stunted. This is despite some successful attempts, for example, in the power and water sectors in oil-rich countries.<sup>20</sup> In some countries, the proximity of private sector entities to public figures in government renders the latter's role less clear cut, making it difficult to introduce or enforce regulations, and guarantee sustainability and resilience among business initiatives. Where the business ecosystem is cumbersome and outdated, it fails to attract or facilitate private sector activities or public-private partnerships, or to improve competitiveness.



### Weak commitment to economic integration at multiple levels

Resilient infrastructure, sustainable industrialization and investment in innovation are indicators of integration into regional and global economies and the fourth industrial revolution. Yet regional integration, assessed as the volume of trade among Arab countries, is the weakest in the world. The region has yet to take concrete steps to harmonize regulations, prioritize regional value chains, or support the emergence of a common market and common currency. These and other actions impact regional and national development trajectories.

Some Arab countries have developed high-quality expressways between major cities, but road density in the region remains low.<sup>21</sup> Poorly integrated regional infrastructure, including for transport, power and logistics, undermines regional economic integration. Political tensions among countries have further jeopardized the mobility of goods and services, and hampered regional and subregional integration.



### The disconnect between research and developmental needs

Compared with the rest of the world, the region has a poor record of association between R&D expenditure and GDP growth, and harnessing innovation to create jobs, and improve industries and services. Despite promising efforts to boost R&D and innovation in several countries, limitations on academic freedom and funding mean that the interface between the academy, science and industry remains anaemic. The current state of education, especially public education, does not serve a transition to innovative research and industry. R&D priorities need to be integrated in educational reform to encourage creativity and innovation, and the uninhibited search for knowledge.



Existing strategies for R&D are sector specific or non-inclusive, or have a short timeline with no emphasis on identifying a country's niches and needs. Collaboration among researchers is limited despite common research areas such as renewable solar energy. While scientific publishing rose between 2005 and 2014, with strong growth in Egypt, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the region's share of world publications is only 2.4 per cent.<sup>22</sup> In 2013, the Arab States' share of patents submitted globally was 0.2 per cent.<sup>23</sup>

### Inadequate industrial and business policies

Small-scale industries suffer from an inefficient and uncondusive regulatory environment, limitations in private investment, and barriers in access to financing, particularly credit. Among Arab countries, the United Arab Emirates may have the most conducive environment for doing business, ranking eleventh globally in 2019. Seventeen Arab countries are ranked 60th or below. Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen are among the most difficult countries globally for doing business.<sup>24</sup>

The region particularly underperforms in access to credit, with a gap that is the largest in the world. This poses a critical challenge to small and medium enterprises. While they comprise about 96 per cent of registered companies and provide about half of employment, they account for only 7 per cent of total bank lending, the lowest level in the world.<sup>25</sup> Access to other financial services such as equity and fintech also remains limited.<sup>26</sup> Some countries have made progress. For example, in Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon, the proportion of small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit stands at 48 per cent, 40 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively. This compares to 4 per cent in Egypt and 13 per cent in Jordan. The difference stems from targeted policy choices supported by central banks.<sup>27</sup> Arab countries also show the largest gender gap in access to formal financial services, with 52 per cent of men and only 35 per cent of women having an account with a bank or mobile money provider.<sup>28</sup>

Business parks, incubators, accelerators and different types of venture capital are growing, particularly in the Mashreq and Maghreb subregions. Venture capital, however, remains focused on seed funding for start-ups, on the lower end of funding, or private equity on the upper end, leaving out financing for small and medium enterprises.<sup>29</sup>



### Conflict

Conflict has resulted in the breakdown of R&D systems, physical destruction of infrastructure and stalled manufacturing. In Yemen, the systematic destruction of vital infrastructure and the blockade resulted in famine and epidemics. Major industrial zones have been destroyed in the Syrian Arab Republic, with 70 per cent of industrial buildings demolished in Aleppo, once a manufacturing hub for pharmaceuticals, textiles, garments, chemicals and agro-processing.<sup>30</sup> Sabotage and terrorist attacks on energy infrastructure have in recent years been reported in Egypt, Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.<sup>31</sup>

Conflict poses a major barrier to regional integration, including through spillover effects on neighbouring countries. Crises and unstable security situations have led to uncertainty in land border access. Land border closures result in direct and indirect impacts on economic activities and the movement of goods. Finding alternate routes for exporting goods through maritime transport and airfreight leads to financial and logistical burdens for producers and governments.



**ICT uptake** is progressing rapidly in the GCC countries, where Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are among the top 10 global adopters of technology. Progress is also occurring in the Mashreq and Maghreb, but moving much more slowly in the least developed countries. At the regional level, however, all Arab countries have been mostly consumers and importers of technology, with limited customization to local needs and principles of inclusive, sustainable development. Without technological adaptation and the cultivation of digital content that is research-guided and needs-oriented, the benefits that technology can bring to development will be lost. Shortfalls could be felt in the productive sectors, social welfare, health care, education, management of natural resources, precision agriculture, disaster risk reduction and other areas.

Source: World Economic Forum, 2018.

## At risk of being left behind

Without infrastructure and connectivity improvements, communities in **rural areas and informal settlements** face difficulties in accessing information as well as essential services such as for health care, education, and water and sanitation. There are notable disparities in the quality and availability of infrastructure and connectivity between urban and rural areas in most Arab countries, particularly in the least developed countries.

Despite the rise in the number of female graduates in the science and technology fields, **women** remain underrepresented in employment in these sectors. More significantly, changing requirements for employment in industry and increased automation will affect low-skilled jobs where women are often concentrated. Rising demand for higher-level skills in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) could help bridge the gap.

Some **groups are affected by digital divides**. These exist between urban and rural areas, men and women, different age groups, and the rich and poor. People who are digitally left behind will not have access to e-services, information and other benefits of technology. ICT data are not yet disaggregated according to different population groups, although there have been recent and ongoing efforts to develop gender-disaggregated ICT data. As governments and industries advance technology, groups currently on the wrong side of the digital divide will need tailored capacity-building and deliberate, phased approaches to ensure they are not fully marginalized as producers and consumers of products and services.

Many people in the **least developed countries** are being left behind on SDG 9. Structural and financial limitations make it difficult for these countries to invest in infrastructure or catch up on technology. For example, while countries in the region have near universal access to electricity, the least developed countries have levels below 50 per cent and as low as 30 per cent in Somalia and 38 per cent in the Sudan. Several subregional electricity interconnection systems

are in place in the Mashreq and Maghreb and for the GCC countries, but these unfortunately bypass the least developed countries. They miss out on a cost-effective and secure electricity supply, access to clean energy and greater job opportunities.<sup>32</sup> Challenges also arise in making technologies affordable to interested users. The subregional average of total official flows for infrastructure (indicator 9.a.1) is notably lower in the least developed countries than in the Mashreq and Maghreb subregions.

According to the latest data, in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait only 2.2 per cent and 4.2 per cent of total employees in industry were **women**, respectively. In Algeria and Tunisia, women's share was up to 23.6 per cent and 33.1 per cent, respectively. In 10 Arab countries, women represent between 34 per cent and 57 per cent of tertiary graduates in science, engineering and agriculture.

Sources: UNESCO, 2015b; ILO, 2019.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 9

### 1. Take serious steps towards economic integration:

- Revitalize commitment to regional integration, and align national development plans and efforts to harmonize cross-border regulations, streamline logistics and tariff systems, and facilitate the mobility of people and goods.
- Develop multimodal transportation systems, regional electric grids and a regional Internet structure (regional backbone and exchange points) that connect Arab countries regionally and to global networks.

### 2. Shift from sectoral manufacturing to integrated, sustainable industrial policies:

- Invest in the circular economy and production, and move manufacturing towards a virtuous cycle driven by green industry and clean technologies.
- Prioritize efficient consumption of environmental goods to reduce and recycle waste.
- Invest in building skills needed for new industries, avoid premature deindustrialization and remedy possible job losses due to automation.

- Develop instruments to support environmentally safe industrial production, such as public procurement, tax exemptions, tariffs and fees, green procurement and trade schemes.<sup>33</sup>
- Improve the ecosystem for private sector contributions across industry, infrastructure and innovation, including through regulatory and legislative frameworks to facilitate investment and partnerships.
- Introduce or enhance the necessary compliance mechanisms for private sector entities to enhance sustainability and resilience, and generate decent work.

### 3. Develop and operationalize coherent science, technology and innovation policy frameworks:

- Develop a plan of action for regulatory interventions, incentives and multistakeholder engagement, and foster a stronger role for women and youth in R&D and STEM fields.
- Identify niche interventions to inform future research agendas.

- Strengthen stakeholder partnerships to support industry, South-South cooperation and technology transfer.
- Integrate science, technology and innovation into national development plans, and monitor implementation and progress through specific indicators.
- Introduce mechanisms to strengthen the science-policy interface across all levels of government, including legislative bodies, and introduce and enforce access to information laws.
- Support regional multistakeholder knowledge-sharing platforms to promote the potential of industry 4.0 (interconnectivity, automation, machine learning and real-time data), and design related training programmes.

#### 4. Innovate:

- Strengthen innovation with a focus on research across sectors and disciplines.
- Create an enabling environment and improve innovation ecosystems, promote entrepreneurship and facilitate the creation of start-ups.
- Expand access to credit and financial services especially for small and medium enterprises, women and youth.
- Enhance collaboration among countries on R&D, harmonize and streamline the exchange of knowledge and expertise among universities and research centres, and support regional research programmes.

## SDG 9 targets and indicators in the Arab region

### Target

**9.1**  
Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all

### Indicator

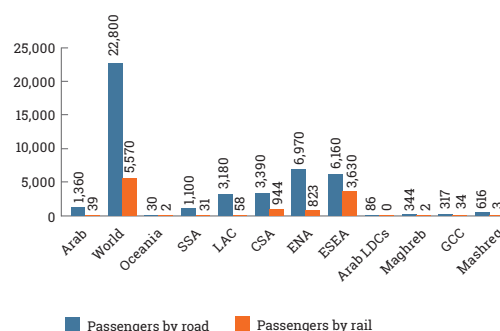
**9.1.1**  
Proportion of the rural population who live within 2 kilometres of an all-season road

**9.1.2**  
Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport\*

### Data

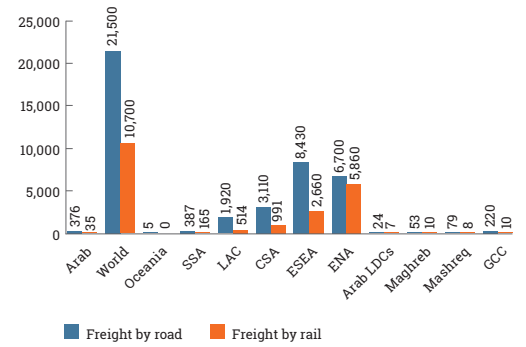
Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Figure 1 Passenger volume by road and rail transport (billions of passenger kilometres)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregates include the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2017.

Figure 2 Freight volume by road and rail transport (billions of tonne-kilometres)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregates include the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2017.

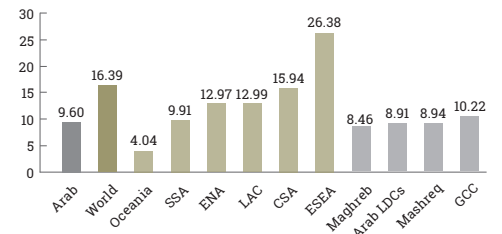
9.2

Promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and, by 2030, significantly raise industry's share of employment and gross domestic product, in line with national circumstances, and double its share in least developed countries

9.2.1

Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita\*\*

Figure 3 Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP (percentage)

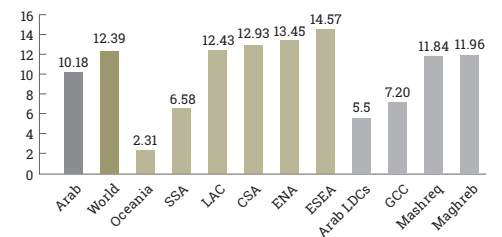


Note: All means are weighted by constant 2010 GDP in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2017, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of 19 Arab countries in 2017.

9.2.2

Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment\*\*

Figure 4 Manufacturing employment as a proportion of total employment (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by constant 2010 GDP in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2017, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of 19 Arab countries in 2017.

9.3

Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets

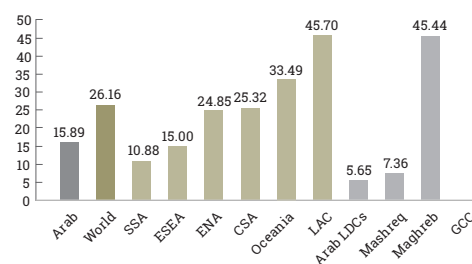
9.3.1

Proportion of small-scale industries in total industry value added

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

### 9.3.2 Proportion of small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit

Figure 5 Proportion of small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit (percentage)

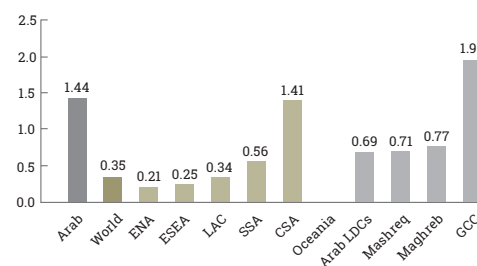


Note: All means are weighted by constant 2010 GDP in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2013, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Iraq (2011), Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen (2013), Mauritania (2014), and Egypt (2016). According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), "this indicator shows how widely financial institutions are serving the 'small-scale industries'. Together with indicator 9.3.1, this indicator reflects the main message of target 9.3 which promotes to increase the access of "small-scale industries" to financial services".

**9.4**  
By 2030, upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies and industrial processes, with all countries taking action in accordance with their respective capabilities

### 9.4.1 Carbon dioxide emission per unit of value added

Figure 6 Carbon dioxide emissions per unit of manufacturing value added (kilogrammes of carbon dioxide per constant 2010 United States dollars)

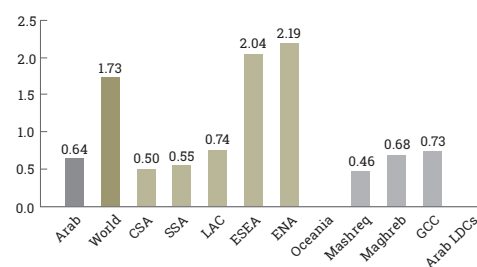


Note: All means are weighted by constant 2010 manufacturing value added in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2015, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries in 2015: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**9.5**  
Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending

### 9.5.1 Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP

Figure 7 Research and development expenditures as a proportion of GDP (percentage)

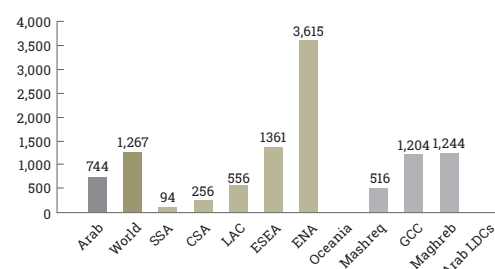


Note: All means are weighted by constant 2011 PPP GDP in international United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2015, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Morocco (2010), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and State of Palestine (2013), Bahrain (2014), Oman, Qatar and Tunisia (2015), and United Arab Emirates (2016).



### 9.5.2 Researchers (in full-time equivalent) per million inhabitants

Figure 8 Number of researchers in full-time equivalent (per 1 million inhabitants)

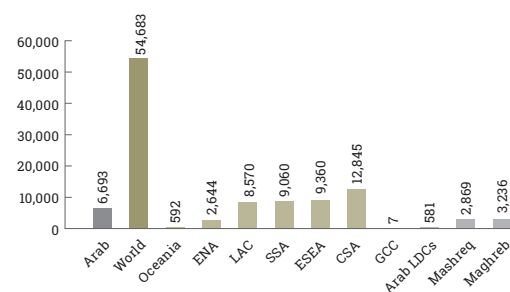


Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Kuwait (2012), State of Palestine (2013), Bahrain (2014), Oman, Qatar and Tunisia (2015), Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and United Arab Emirates (2016).

**9.a**  
Facilitate sustainable and resilient infrastructure development in developing countries through enhanced financial, technological and technical support to African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States

### 9.a.1 Total official international support (official development assistance plus other official flows) to infrastructure

Figure 9 Total official flows for infrastructure, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)

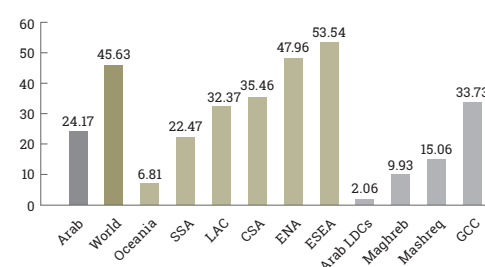


Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Oman (2010), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2017).

**9.b**  
Support domestic technology development, research and innovation in developing countries, including by ensuring a conducive policy environment for, inter alia, industrial diversification and value addition to commodities

### 9.b.1 Proportion of medium and high-tech industry value added in total value added

Figure 10 Proportion of medium and high-tech industry value added in total value added (percentage)

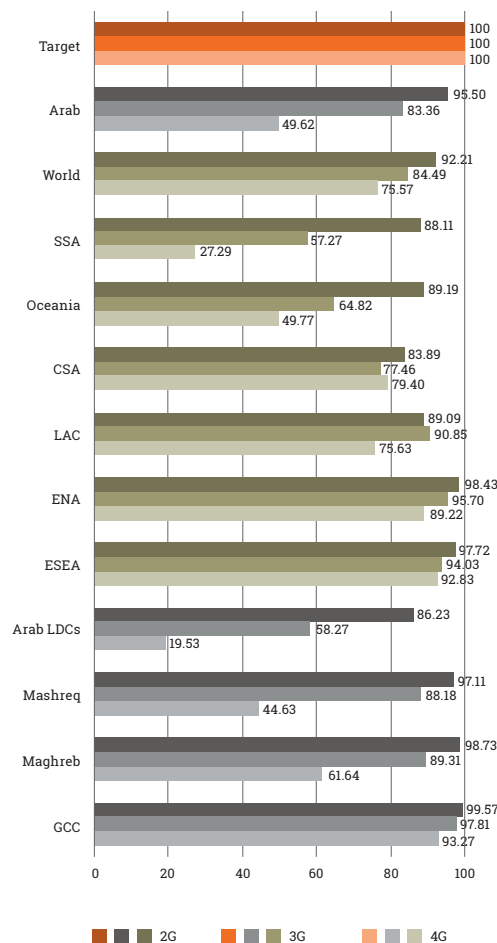


Note: All means are weighted by constant 2010 manufacturing value added in United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2016, taken from the World Bank's World Development Indicators. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries in 2016: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), "The proportion of medium and high-tech industry (MHT) value added in total value added of manufacturing (MVA) is a ratio value between the value added of MHT industry and MVA. Industrial development generally entails a structural transition from resource-based and low technology activities to MHT activities. A modern, highly complex production structure offers better opportunities for skills development and technological innovation. MHT activities are also the high value addition industries of manufacturing with higher technological intensity and labour productivity. Increasing the share of MHT sectors also reflects the impact of innovation".

**9.c**  
**Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020**

**9.c.1**  
**Proportion of population covered by a mobile network, by technology**

**Figure 11** Proportion of population covered by at least a 2G mobile network, at least a 3G mobile network, and at least a 4G mobile network (percentage)



Note: All means of the three series were population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).

2G coverage: The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Djibouti (2012), Libya (2013), Somalia (2014), Iraq, Lebanon (2015), Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2016).

3G coverage: The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries in 2016, except Comoros.

4G coverage: The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries in 2017, except the State of Palestine (2016).

\* Besides the connectivity of infrastructure, indicator 9.1.2 also reflects the size of an economy and the number of people living in a particular country or region. Therefore, the interpretation of the presented numbers is not as simple as higher is necessarily better; numbers should be considered relative to the country/region's size and needs.

\*\* According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), "Manufacturing value added (MVA) as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) is a ratio between MVA and GDP, both reported in constant 2010 USD. MVA is a well-recognized and widely used indicator by researchers and policy makers to assess the level of industrialization of a country. The share of MVA in GDP reflects the role of manufacturing in the economy and a country's national development in general." Moreover, the metadata affirm that "the share of manufacturing employment in total employment represents the contribution of manufacturing in job creation" (ibid.). Indicators 9.2.1 and 9.2.2 are interpreted differently for developed and developing countries. For a developing country and for each of the two indicators, the higher the value the better the performance. In a developed/industrial country, for performance to be considered good, when the second indicator is high, the first should also be high, but when the second indicator is low, the first can either be low or high depending on the structure of the economy (e.g., if the economy relies on or promotes capital-intensive instead of labour-intensive industry, etc.).

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) for the following indicators: 9.1.2 [Passenger and freight volumes, by mode of transport], 9.2.1 [Manufacturing value added as a proportion of GDP and per capita], 9.a.1 [Total official flows for infrastructure (millions of constant 2016 United States dollars)], 9.b.1 [Total official flows for infrastructure, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)], and 9.c.1 [Proportion of population covered by at least a 2G mobile network, covered by at least a 3G mobile network, and covered by at least a 4G mobile network (percentage)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. World Bank, 2012. The statement refers to regional country groupings as indicated in the reference.
2. ESCWA, 2019d.
3. ESCWA, 2017a.
4. Ibid.
5. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 6.
6. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
7. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 4.
8. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 7. Also see UNESCO, 2015b.
9. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 8.
10. For more on country values, refer to the annex complementing this report.
11. Zou'bi and others, 2015.
12. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 5.
13. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 10. For more on country values, refer to the annex complementing this report.
14. GSMA, 2019.
15. ITU, 2019.
16. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 11.
17. ITU, 2018. Values are for 2018.
18. UN Women, 2018; UN Women and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019.
19. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
20. ESCWA, 2013.
21. ESCWA, 2017a.
22. UNESCO, 2015b.
23. UNESCO, 2015a.
24. World Bank, 2019.
25. Azour, 2019.
26. For more information, see Saleem, 2017; Rocha, Arvai and Farazi, 2011.
27. For details on country figures, refer to the annex complementing this report.
28. World Bank, 2018.
29. ESCWA, 2018.
30. World Bank, 2017.
31. ESCWA, 2019b.
32. Calculated by ESCWA, based on United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a. Refer also to SDG 7 in this report.
33. ESCWA, 2019c.

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**We resolve, between now and 2030, to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources. We resolve also to create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities.**

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



## SDG 10: Reduce inequalities within and among countries

Levels of income, access to resources and services, and political participation vary widely across and within the Arab States. Inequality runs along class, subnational and gender divides, among others. Despite few official measures of inequality, widening gaps among different social groups and areas can readily be observed. These threaten social cohesion as well as economic prosperity and political stability. Reducing inequalities requires reasserting the role of the State as the guarantor of equal economic and social rights, and implementing policies to equitably redistribute resources. This is a political process first and foremost. At the national level, it necessitates structural changes in economies and institutions as well as social and legal changes to end all forms of discrimination. Supportive global mechanisms must also be in place.

### Key facts



There is a striking disconnect in the region between economic growth at the national level and the relatively sluggish increase in household income, suggesting that economic growth is concentrating wealth and failing to reduce inequality.<sup>1</sup>

### GNI per capita

The gaps between GNI per capita and average household income are significant and widening, especially in middle-income countries such as Egypt and Iraq. In the former, households reported a real income growth of 30 per cent over a 25-year period compared to the 70 per cent growth in the economy as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

**10%**

The Arab region has registered some of the highest levels of income inequality in the world. In some countries, the top 10 per cent of earners account for more than 60 per cent of national income.<sup>3</sup>

**10%**  
**50%**

Inequality in the shares of national income between the top 10 per cent and the bottom 50 per cent is particularly high. For example, shares are, respectively, 68 per cent and 9 per cent in Qatar, 62 per cent and 8 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 57 per cent and 11 per cent in Lebanon, 53 per cent and 12 per cent in Bahrain, and 50 per cent and 14 per cent in Yemen.<sup>4</sup>

### Taxation

Taxation is generally regressive, consisting mainly of indirect taxes and/or taxes on rents. There is little evidence of more progressive taxation policies targeting the wealthier.<sup>5</sup> Progressive inheritance tax regimes are almost universally absent, contributing to further concentration of wealth and depriving States of additional public funds.<sup>6</sup>



In 2015, 94 per cent of the urban population in the region used a basic drinking water service compared to 77.5 per cent of the rural population; only 80 per cent of people in rural areas could access electricity.



Women from poorer rural areas are more likely than urban women to drop out of school, be married early, give birth at an early age, engage in informal employment, suffer complications during childbirth and experience gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup>

### 8.3% women in managerial positions

Arab countries are among those ranked last globally in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report. The region also has the lowest average in the world for women in managerial positions at 8.3 per cent compared to 27.6 per cent globally.<sup>8</sup>

## Inequalities among groups

Inequalities in opportunities, including access to health services, education and decent work, have resulted in stark inequalities within and among sociodemographic groups. Fewer than 10 per cent of older people receive pension benefits in Mauritania, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Yemen.<sup>9</sup>



The presence of Arab countries in global financial institutions is comparable to the world average, but voting rights are relatively weaker. The Arab least developed countries are the weakest both in terms of membership and voting rights.<sup>11</sup>

### x 20

Intraregional inequality is high and rising. In 2010, the average GNI per capita of Arab countries with a very high human development rating was 13 times that of countries with a low human development rating. By 2017, the gap was 20 times.

## Bilateral assistance

A third of total bilateral assistance provided by Arab countries in 2016 went to other Arab countries. Among Arab development institutions, 54 per cent of assistance to developing countries went to Arab countries in 2017.<sup>12</sup>



The average cost for migrants to send remittances in the Arab region, as a proportion of the amount remitted,

stood at 6.8 per cent in 2017, lower than the global average of 8.09 per cent for the same period but more than double the global target.<sup>10</sup>

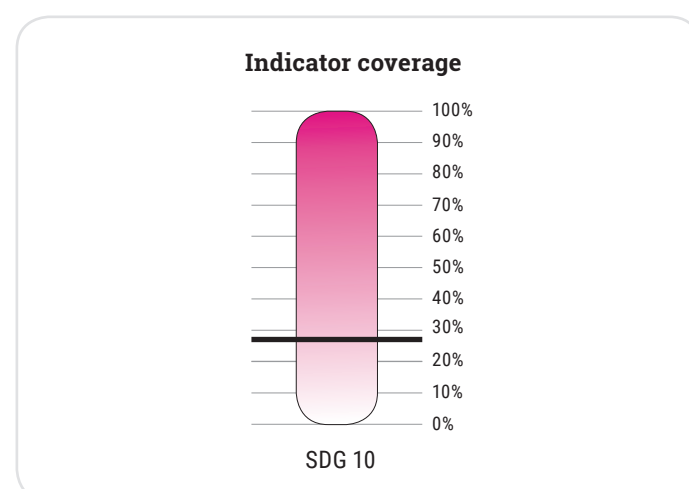
## Measuring SDG 10 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 3 out of 11 indicators,<sup>13</sup> covering 3 out of 10 targets under SDG 10.

SDG 10 is complex and conceptually challenging. It addresses multiple inequalities that cut across the SDGs. And while it considers income inequality and the importance of increasing the income of the poorest, it does not measure the wealth of the top earners or economic distribution, even though these may be the roots of other forms of exclusion.

More work is needed to conceptualize and design methodologies and tools to measure inequality and identify indicators that reflect the primary distribution of power and resources, and the extent to which they amplify or reduce inequality.

More than half of the targets under SDG 10 address dynamics among countries or those related to global financial or trade systems (targets 10.5, 10.6, 10.7, 10.a, 10.b and 10.c). Stronger links between monitoring SDG 10 indicators at the national and global levels therefore have to be established to contextualize and understand the implications.



The following issues arise in measuring SDG 10 in the Arab region:

- Figures are not systematically available to cover the region, and are rarely disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

- Household surveys remain the predominant method of data collection, masking inequality within the household, especially among women and children.
- SDG 10 indicators are more adequate to assess poverty than inequality. They focus more on inclusion of the poorest, and less on relative income and wealth distribution across society.
- In countries where national income averages are high and rising, the focus on the poorest detracts from the widening gap between the rich and poor, and the shrinking middle class.<sup>14</sup>
- Despite its relevance across the SDGs, safe, orderly and regular migration appears as a target only within SDG 10. The indicators associated with this target, measuring recruitment cost borne by employees (10.7.1) and the number of countries implementing well-managed migration policies (10.7.2), fall short of capturing the extent to which migration is safe, orderly and regular. In addition, the lack of disaggregation by migratory status across the indicators of all 17 SDGs excludes migrants and migration from measurement as well as integrated policy analysis and planning.

## The main barriers to reducing inequality within and among countries in the Arab region

Reducing inequality is integral to achieving all 17 SDGs because the goals have to be realized “for all”. SDG 10 promotes an understanding of inequality that cuts across human capabilities, access to services and resources, and representation and participation in social, political and economic life.

Achieving the goal is closely intertwined with accomplishing SDG 16, given the importance of representative politics, and the role of the State in guaranteeing social justice and equality before the law, and ensuring equitable social protection floors and the fair distribution of benefits.

In the Arab region, inequality and marginalization are major concerns. Different social groups and geographical areas have significantly varied access to economic, social and political power, including the power to address the environmental dimension of development. Examples of these groups include women and girls as well as subgroups such as rural women or women with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, migrant workers, people in poverty, the geographically marginalized and so on. While constitutional guarantees of equality exist in most Arab countries, robust enforcement mechanisms, transparent State institutions and universal access to justice are less common.

In **Lebanon** in 2016, the richest 1 per cent and 10 per cent of the adult population had an estimated 24 per cent and 57 per cent of national income on average, respectively, and more than 45 per cent and 70 per cent of total personal wealth. These findings resulted from an innovative study that used fiscal data to correct for downward biases in household surveys.

Source: Assouad, 2018a; updated data from World Inequality Database, 2016a.

SDG 10 covers a wide geographical scope from the subnational level to the national and global levels, and global structures impinge on national progress. Barriers to its achievement are determined according to each country’s historical development trajectory as well as the impact of geopolitics, conflict and global economic governance systems. Reforming global economic structures to reduce inequalities among countries and regions would directly impact national development. Global and regional commitments to aid developing and least developed countries, to share knowledge and technologies and to support more inclusive global governance structures, as reflected in SDG 17, are other factors elemental to SDG 10.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 10 IN THE ARAB REGION

#### The role of the State and fiscal policies

Despite a history of spending on public services, subsidies and public sector employment in Arab countries, these measures have not diminished inequality among different social groups. Nor have efforts been made to restructure economies to promote prosperity and inclusive growth (SDG 8). Current practices in fiscal and monetary policies have been geared towards containing public expenditures, budget deficits, government debt and inflation. Further, the Arab region has the world’s highest military expenditures as a share of GDP, around 6.2 per cent in 2016, compared with the second highest figure of 2.06 per cent in North America.<sup>15</sup> Spending on social protection, on the other hand, is relatively low, hovering at around 2.5 per cent of GDP (excluding health care).<sup>16</sup> The distributional impact of such policies on wealth among regions and social groups has been generally limited.





The strong centralization of policymaking in the Arab States exacerbates inequality at the subnational level. Centralization has often translated into policies, budgets and practices that privilege the centre or a few geographical areas at the expense of others.

Decentralization and fiscal decentralization also call for an effective and representative central Government, however. Weak political representation, especially of marginalized groups, and the elite's ability to influence key decisions throughout the region limit the State's ability to assume its central role in redistributing wealth for development. The result is reduced effectiveness of State institutions and constraints on democratic governance and citizen engagement at the national, subnational and local levels. Uprisings have swept the region since 2010, and the people have expressed deep grievances and articulated a clear call for more transparency and functionality in local government institutions as well as more fairness in the distribution of wealth and quality services.

### Structure of the economy, job creation and quality of education



The structure of Arab economies, relying on rents or locked in low value added activities with limited job creation, excludes significant shares of the population. The region in 2016 had the world's highest unemployment rate at 10.3 per cent, double the world average.<sup>17</sup> The poor are often trapped in informal or intermittent employment, increasing their vulnerability and accentuating inequality in access to services. Different methods estimate informal employment in the region, excluding the agricultural sector, at 45 or 65 per cent.<sup>18</sup> Other evidence of exclusion comes from the limited share of small and medium-sized enterprises with access to a loan or credit. At around 16 per cent in the region, it is the lowest share among all regions worldwide.<sup>19</sup>

While in some Arab countries, especially the GCC countries, oil resources have been used to reduce poverty and extend access to health care and education, these advances have not been matched by progress towards political inclusion and the realization of human rights. Flagrant inequalities exist between nationals and the large shares of non-national migrant workers in oil-rich countries. Furthermore, in a challenge to intergenerational equity, the benefits from oil and public spending will likely not accrue to future generations, given diminishing or depleted reserves.

Within middle-income countries and the least developed countries, weak social protection (SDG 1) and the declining quality of public education (SDG 4) further marginalize the poor. The rapid expansion of private education in the past decade, along with the extra resources for private tutoring and other elements needed to succeed, have essentially closed the door to higher education for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The situation poses particular challenges to students from rural areas who have fewer options. In Egypt, the probability that a young person from a most advantaged background will attend university is 97 per cent, compared to only 9 per cent for a youth from a most vulnerable background.<sup>20</sup>

### Laws, norms and attitudes



Discrimination on the basis of gender and other attributes, including religious, sectarian and ethnic identities, combines with weak representative political structures to foster social and political exclusion. For example, legal discrimination against women is bolstered by social norms that marginalize their economic and political participation and increase their vulnerability to violence. Few laws criminalize discrimination on the basis of gender, disability, or religious, sectarian or other identity. Where such laws do exist, they may not be properly enforced, undermining constitutional articles committing to equality regardless of social identity or status. The region has the world's lowest participation rates of women in the economy as well as in parliaments, with their share of national legislative seats reaching only 19.4 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

Persons with disabilities face social stigma and exclusion in addition to physical barriers to integration in the labour market, educational systems and public life. In 9 of 10 countries with available data, the employment rate for persons with disabilities is no higher than 14 per cent for women and 34 per cent for men, and often it is much lower than that.<sup>22</sup>

The integration of universal human rights in educational curricula to promote the values of equality, acceptance and rights for all, regardless of identity or status, remains limited (SDG 4).

### Imbalanced international system



Biased global economic governance systems restrict the representation and participation of developing countries in decision-making, and weaken global accountability, especially on issues of trade and intellectual property. SDGs 10 and 17 attempt to address these shortfalls. Global conditions shape Arab countries' macroeconomic and policy frameworks, and the structure of their economies, and constrain their ability to mobilize resources. Imbalanced global trade governance is felt not only at the national level but by the most vulnerable within countries, such as small farmers, who face extreme disadvantages due in part to protectionist measures by richer and more powerful countries.

This imbalance has a particularly negative effect on the least developed countries, which are most in need of additional international resources but have the most limited representation in the forums that decide how these are used. Such countries require substantial international aid, for example, yet this has been decreasing globally. The State of Palestine has no membership or voting rights in any global financial institution.<sup>23</sup>

## Violent conflicts and war economies



Conflicts in the region deepen exclusion and marginalization. Worsening economic and political conditions cause regressions in development gains. The material and human costs of conflict, in addition to the damage to institutions and infrastructure, further widen gaps within conflict countries, and between conflict countries and others. Internally displaced people face multiple hurdles in accessing services and securing employment. The region's large population of refugees also confronts many forms of exclusion, which are often exacerbated by their lack of official documentation, and deepened by discriminatory policies and social intolerance. By 2016, an estimated 15 million children aged 5 to 14 in the region were being deprived of schooling because of conflict, mainly in Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.<sup>24</sup>

The total wealth of the 42 **richest Arabs** in 2017, at \$123 billion, was approximately equal to the combined GDP of the Comoros, Mauritania, the Sudan and Yemen.

Forty per cent of the richest Arabs had, or previously had, government or political affiliations, suggesting a concentration and conflation of political and economic power.

Source: ESCWA and ERF, 2019.

**Inequality of opportunity in education** is high in the region. For example, the most advantaged children in Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia have more than 90 per cent chance of reaching secondary school, whereas the least advantaged children in these countries have a 30 to 68 per cent chance depending on whether they are boys or girls. In Iraq, the least advantaged children have a 13 per cent probability of reaching secondary school versus 64 to 71 per cent for the most advantaged.

**Inequality of outcome in education** is reflected in secondary cycle completion rates that vary between urban and rural areas, with Comoros, Mauritania, Morocco, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen reporting some of the highest rural-urban gaps.

Source: Assaad and others, 2019; ESCWA and ERF, 2019.

The Arab region hosted 40 million **migrants** in 2019, almost 15 per cent of the total of 272 million international migrants worldwide. An estimated 32 million people migrated from Arab countries; 45 per cent migrated within the region. Complex migration patterns and trends offer opportunities for development yet pose challenges if not well managed. The Arab region received more than \$54 billion in remittances in 2018, almost double the amount of official development assistance and aid. States across the region, however, continue to face considerable challenges that hinder development and increase inequality among migrants, including high recruitment fees borne by migrants, poor working conditions particularly for low-skilled workers, large wage gaps between migrant and non-migrant workers, limited access to basic services and justice mechanisms, and limited freedom of association.

Source: ESCWA and IOM, 2019; United Nations Population Division, 2019; World Bank, 2018.

## At risk of being left behind

Inequality in the Arab region manifests in part through the lack of social protection systems that could buffer marginalization and exclusion. It is amplified by legal and social discrimination. Therefore, many social groups and categories are at risk of being left behind, on issues across the SDGs. Prominent examples include **women and girls, the poor, persons with disabilities, older persons, children, youth, those outside of formal employment, migrant workers, refugees, internally displaced persons and slum dwellers.**

In Morocco, maternal mortality rates declined considerably, mainly due to declines in rural areas. However, the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births was 44.6 in urban areas in 2015 to 2016, compared to 111.4 in rural areas. This **rural-urban divide** is also reflected in variations in the number of women who benefit from care during childbirth as well as ante- and postnatal care.

Source: Ministry of Health in Morocco, 2018.

The urban-rural divide cuts across the goals. For example, children in **rural areas** are 3.6 times more likely to be acutely poor than children in urban areas, reflecting rural-urban inequality.<sup>25</sup> The majority of the undernourished in the Arab region live in rural areas where agriculture is often the main source of income (SDG 2). While access to electricity is close to universal in cities, it is only around 80 per cent in rural areas (SDG 7). Among persons with disabilities, girls and women in rural areas have the lowest rates of literacy, educational attainment and school attendance (SDG 5).

In considering SDG 10, two categories are particularly challenging and face heightened risks:

**People locked in intersecting inequalities** face multiple barriers that reinforce and exacerbate each other. Migrant domestic workers are at an increased risk of exploitation and violence. A disabled and illiterate woman living in a rural area faces multiple challenges, yet her constraints are rarely captured or estimated by conventional methodologies, leading to further marginalization.

**The least developed countries** lag well behind other countries in the region on all of the SDGs. For example, maternal mortality in the least developed countries is 493 deaths per 100,000 live births, almost three times the

rate for the second highest Arab subregion, the Maghreb, at 113 deaths per 100,000 live births. Health worker density in the least developed countries, measured as the number of physicians per 1,000 people, is about a fifth of the regional average (SDG 3). The participation rate in organized learning one year before the official primary entry age is 5.62 per cent in these countries compared to the regional average of 47.16 per cent (SDG 4). The almost universal access to electricity across the region drops to 48 per cent for the least developed countries (SDG 7). The proportion of children engaged in economic activity is 14.8 per cent there compared to 3.7 per cent in the Mashreq and 3.3 per cent in the Maghreb (SDG 8).<sup>26</sup>

Weak production capacities and knowledge and financing constraints impede progress for the least developed countries. They need a structural transformation of their economies to break the vicious cycle of high poverty and low growth that, in some cases, is further aggravated by conflict. They also need support to enhance human capabilities and institutional capacity. Moreover, without levelling the playing field globally and regionally to allow these countries more voice and representation in international trade and financial systems, they will remain in a precarious position and unable to compete equitably with others in global markets.

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## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 10

Progress on SDG 10 is linked to all of the SDGs. Achievement is specifically intertwined with reducing economic inequality, strengthening political participation and addressing discrimination.

### 1. Strengthen the State's central role in redistribution, and as a guarantor of equal political, social and economic rights:

- Build political consensus and administrative capacities in policymaking for redistribution and inclusion.
- Bolster accountability mechanisms, including audit and watchdog institutions, and improve transparency to curb corruption, such as through regulation of the relationship between government and the private sector.
- Enhance governance at all levels, including locally.
- Introduce antidiscrimination legislation and change discriminatory laws in line with international human rights laws, in particular to ensure gender equality.
- Introduce, evaluate and strengthen enforcement mechanisms for existing and new antidiscrimination laws, and enhance the independence of the judiciary.

### 2. Address political and economic deficits by applying redistributive policies and taking action accordingly:

- Introduce a comprehensive set of macroeconomic policies and fiscal reforms that will effectively drive employment growth and generate new, decent employment opportunities.
- Introduce and enforce progressive taxation to expand public expenditure and decrease the wealth gap at the national level.
- Encourage the allocation of domestic and foreign direct investment to high value added segments of the economy.
- Establish, reform and progressively expand national social protection floors to provide a minimum level of income security to all.
- Expand non-contributory, tax-financed protection schemes given significant employment in the informal sector, especially in the least developed countries where poverty rates are high.

### 3. Expand civic space and strengthen representative institutions:

- Remove limitations on civil society, including on assembly and resource mobilization.
- Lift constraints on the participation and representation of youth, women and all social groups in political processes, especially at the local level.

### 4. Push for regional and global partnerships in favour of the least developed countries:

- Fulfil international commitments to support the least developed countries, including through ODA, and in line with the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries.
- Lower technical trade and other barriers facing these countries, including through reducing restrictions on

or allowing duty-free exports from them, and engaging them in regional and global value chains.

- Grant priorities or assign quotas to labour from the least developed countries, combined with capacity-building programmes to enhance competitiveness.

### 5. Collect systematic data to study the distributional impact of public policy, primarily fiscal policy:

- Increase efforts in national statistical offices to collect disaggregated data related to SDG 10.
- Analyse the distributional impact of proposed policies, such as those defining the composition and impact of spending on inequality, the impact of taxes on inequality, and the amount of tax that can be collected.

## SDG 10 targets and indicators in the Arab region

Target	Indicator	Data
<p><b>10.1</b> By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average</p>	<p><b>10.1.1</b> Growth rates of household expenditure or income per capita among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>10.2</b> By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status</p>	<p><b>10.2.1</b> Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>10.3</b> Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard</p>	<p><b>10.3.1</b> Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

**10.4**

Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

**10.4.1**

Labour share of GDP, comprising wages and social protection transfers

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**10.5**

Improve the regulation and monitoring of global financial markets and institutions and strengthen the implementation of such regulations

**10.5.1**

Financial Soundness Indicators

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

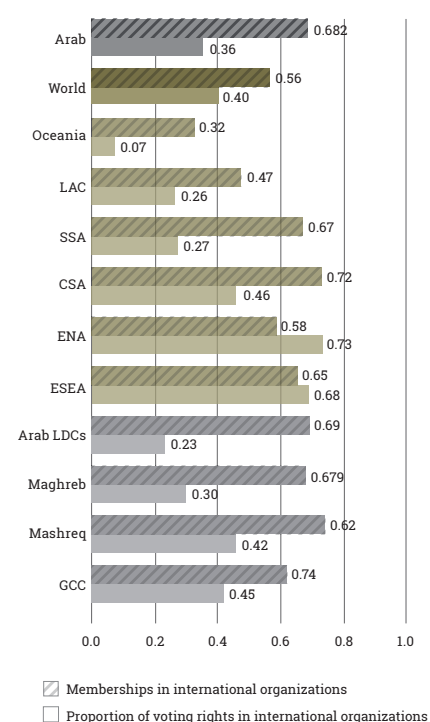
**10.6**

Ensure enhanced representation and voice for developing countries in decision-making in global international economic and financial institutions in order to deliver more effective, credible, accountable and legitimate institutions

**10.6.1**

Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organizations

Figure 1 Membership and voting rights in international organizations



Notes: Aggregates are unweighted means of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017. We visualize and analyse the two subindicators of SDG 10.6.1 separately, since they are at a different scale and unit, and represent different concepts. The index of the first subindicator is the simple arithmetic mean of seven dummy variables, one for each international organization, which take a value of 1 if the country is a member and a 0 if not. The index of the second subindicator is the simple arithmetic mean of seven variables depicting the voting power of the countries in each of the seven international organizations, as calculated/reported by the data sources in the annex to this chapter.

**10.7**

Facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

**10.7.1**

Recruitment cost borne by employee as a proportion of monthly income earned in country of destination

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**10.7.2**

Number of countries with migration policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**10.a**  
Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization agreements

**10.b**  
Encourage official development assistance and financial flows, including foreign direct investment, to States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries, in accordance with their national plans and programmes

**10.c**  
By 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent

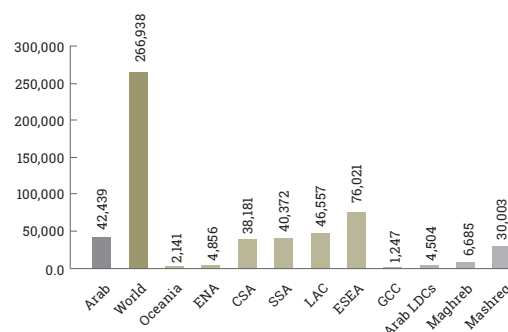
**10.a.1**  
Proportion of tariff lines applied to imports from least developed countries and developing countries with zero-tariffe

**10.b.1**  
Total resource flows for development, by recipient and donor countries and type of flow (e.g. official development assistance, foreign direct investment and other flows)

**10.c.1**  
Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

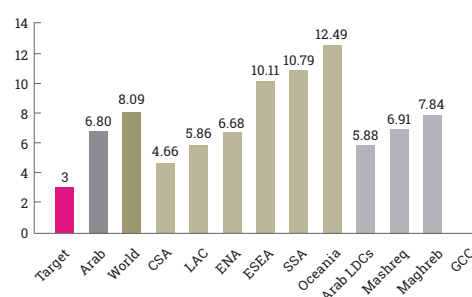
Figure 2 Total assistance for development by recipient (millions of current United States dollars)



Notes: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2016: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen; with 2010 data for Oman. This indicator only covers recipient countries and excludes 41 donor countries from different regions that are either listed by the OECD or included in the data set of the second subindicator of SDG 10.b.1 as donors.

The indicator comprises both positive and negative (and economically significant) values across observations as it measures net ODA, which includes loan repayments that are "recorded as negative and deducted from ODA and loans". "In some cases loan repayments are higher than new ODA and net ODA will show as a negative number" (OECD 2019).

Figure 3 Remittance costs as a proportion of the amount remitted (percentage)



Notes: Aggregates are unweighted means of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. According to the SDG Indicators Metadata Repository, this indicator aims to make the "transaction costs for migrant remittances be 3% or less, by 2030" and "to eliminate corridors where cost is 5% or higher" by that time (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019).

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018).

## ENDNOTES

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1. ESCWA and ERF, 2019.
2. Ibid.
3. World Inequality Lab, 2018. Note: Arab countries included in the report are: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. It also covers Iran and Turkey.
4. World Inequality Database, 2016b.
5. ESCWA, 2017. An indirect tax is collected by an intermediary from the person who bears the ultimate economic burden of the tax. This type of tax raises the prices of products on which they are imposed. Customs duties, central excise taxes, service taxes and value added taxes are examples of indirect taxes.
6. Assouad, 2018b.
7. WHO and UNICEF, 2018.
8. Calculated by ESCWA, see the chapter on SDG 5.
9. ESCWA, 2018c.
10. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
11. Analysis by ESCWA, see figure 1.
12. AFED, 2018; AMF, 2016.
13. According to the methodology used in this report.
14. For further reading, refer to ESCWA, 2014.
15. ESCWA calculations based on GDP data from World Bank, 2019; SIPRI, 2018.
16. ILO, 2017.
17. Calculated by ESCWA, see the chapter on SDG 8.
18. Chen and Harvey, 2017.
19. Calculated by ESCWA, see the chapter on SDG 9.
20. ESCWA, 2018b.
21. Calculated by ESCWA, see the chapter on SDG 5.
22. ESCWA, 2018a.
23. Analysis by ESCWA, see figure 1. For more details on country values, please see the annex complementing this chapter.
24. UNICEF, 2019, p. 41.
25. UNICEF, 2017.
26. Calculated by ESCWA, see the chapter on SDG 8.

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**We recognize that sustainable urban development and management are crucial to the quality of life of our people. We will work with local authorities and communities to renew and plan our cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion and personal security and to stimulate innovation and employment. We will reduce the negative impacts of urban activities and of chemicals which are hazardous for human health and the environment, including through the environmentally sound management and safe use of chemicals, the reduction and recycling of waste and the more efficient use of water and energy. And we will work to minimize the impact of cities on the global climate system. We will also take account of population trends and projections in our national rural and urban development strategies and policies.**

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



## SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Arab cities are vibrant centres of economic, cultural and social activity. Across the region, however, increasing and unplanned urbanization, largely due to poverty, climate change and conflict, places immense pressure on cities and human settlements as well as scarce natural resources. This is exacerbating exclusion and vulnerability. While cities have historically hosted diverse groups of internal and international migrants as well as displaced people, inequalities in and among cities and settlements are pervasive. Disparities persist in access to quality land and housing, services and infrastructure, as well as public spaces and a clean environment. To accelerate progress on SDG 11, Arab countries must meet the challenges of urbanization with people-centred planning and integrated spatial policies. Better governance in cities and settlements is another imperative, along with the sustainable management of natural resources, including land.

### Key facts

#### Urban population

The urban population in the Arab region grew more than fourfold from 1970 to 2010. It will more than double from 2010 to 2050.<sup>1</sup>



Most cities in the region suffer from a shortage of affordable housing.<sup>2</sup>

#### 70% in cities by 2050

Some 58 per cent of people in the region live in urban areas. The share is expected to reach 62 per cent in 2030 and 70 per cent in 2050.<sup>3</sup>



Escalating land values and the rapid appreciation of buildings since the mid-1970s have led to a segmented land market, a lack of affordable housing and the spread of unplanned urbanization.

**30.9%**

The average share of urban dwellers living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing is 30.9 per cent.<sup>4</sup> By country, figures range from 8 per cent in Tunisia to 47.2 per cent in Iraq and 91.6 per cent in the Sudan.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.7 million refugees

#### 14.9 million IDPs

By mid-2018, there were 3.7 million refugees under the UNHCR mandate in the region, in addition to 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. Close to 14.9 million people were internally displaced in the region in 2017.<sup>6</sup>



Currently, most displaced people live in non-camp settings, particularly in cities, adding pressure on local governments, which are at the forefront of meeting their daily needs.<sup>7</sup>

**98%**

Almost 98 per cent of people in the region are exposed to levels of particulate matter in the air that exceed World Health Organization guidelines.<sup>8</sup>

#### 5 Arab countries in top 10 polluted countries

Five Arab countries—Egypt, Kuwait, Libya, Qatar and Saudi Arabia—are ranked among the top 10 polluted countries worldwide. Three Arab countries—Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia—are among the top 10 countries with the most deaths from air pollution.<sup>9</sup>



Cities across the Arab region remain largely inaccessible for persons with disabilities, despite some notable recent initiatives to improve physical accessibility, and address stigma and social exclusion.<sup>10</sup>



2%

Public spaces constituted just 2 per cent of Arab cities in 2016 compared to an average of 12 per cent in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

25% CO<sub>2</sub>

In several cities, private vehicles account for over two thirds of urban

## 5% of property value

Registration of property transactions in the region takes an average of 37.9 days compared to 20.3 days in Europe and Central Asia. The procedure imposes a cost estimated at 5 per cent of property value.<sup>13</sup>

## Urban governance

Participatory urban governance remains weak across the region. While Arab States are increasingly prioritizing urbanization in national agendas, the majority of national urban policies are in an early stage of development.<sup>14</sup>

trips. Transport contributes around 25 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions.<sup>12</sup>

## Measuring SDG 11 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 4 out of 15 indicators, covering 3 out of 10 targets under SDG 11.

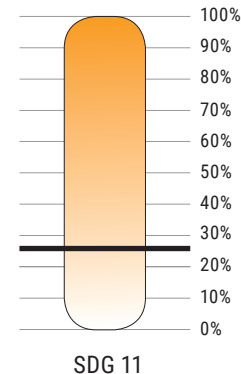
A number of the targets cannot be adequately measured in the region. These targets fall into three categories:

- Targets to ensure inclusive cities, and the participation of civil society in human settlement planning and management (targets 11.2, 11.3, 11.7 and 11.a).
- Targets to ensure sustainability in land management (targets 11.6, 11.3, 11.7, 11.a, 11.b and 11.c).
- Targets to ensure resilience to natural and human-caused disasters (targets 11.5, 11.6 and 11.b).

Challenges hampering the measurement of and reporting on SDG 11 in the region include the lack of data disaggregated by income, sex, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, migratory status, geographical location and other characteristics.

Furthermore, many SDG 11 indicators require data collection at the city level, outside the scope of routine data collection mechanisms such as censuses or household surveys. Among the 15 proposed indicators, seven require some form of local data collection and analysis as well as a clear method for data collection and analysis at the level of urban agglomerations. These indicators include 11.2.1 on public transport, 11.3.1 on efficient land use, 11.5.1 on people affected by disasters, 11.6.1 and 11.6.2 on urban solid waste and air quality, 11.7.1 on public space, and 11.b indicators on climate change and resilience.

Indicator coverage



A spatial component is a common feature of all non-traditional sources of data necessary for these seven indicators. All seven call for an understanding of the organization and density of human settlements, which can be attained through spatial analysis using techniques such as remote sensing and geographic information systems (GIS).

Monitoring and reporting at the city level depend on developing functional definitions of cities and rural areas as distinct units. Further, with more than seven targets requiring local data to produce national aggregates, new partnerships and systems for producing and processing data are needed. Collection and reporting of data are in many cases still the responsibility of ministries of planning rather than a distinct authority able to coordinate with cities and municipalities. Only a few urban observatories are engaged in data collection, policy consultations and reporting processes.

### SDG 11 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

**TARGET 11.b** - Substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency,

mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

## The main barriers to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable in the Arab region

The Arab region has witnessed a significant increase in urbanization over the past few decades. Population growth is a main factor as are poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10). The lack of education and job opportunities in rural areas (SDGs 4 and 8), a largely unproductive agricultural sector and limited arable land (SDG 2) drive people to urban settlements. Climate change (SDG 13) is making matters worse as it exposes people to water stress and coastal flooding. Drought and water stress further erode rural livelihoods. Increasing pollution in cities is a major cause of illness and disease (SDG 3). Conflict has destroyed land, communities and infrastructure, and increased the movement of people from rural areas to urban centres, which struggle to accommodate waves of refugees and the internally displaced.

SDG 11 calls for participatory urban governance. While local and provincial elections have become more frequent and involve wider voter participation, mechanisms for citizen engagement, access to information, robust consultations, and the role of community-based organizations and youth in decision-making remain weak (SDG 16).

Many urban settlements are now marked by inequality and exclusion, growing slums, absent or inadequate essential services, such as sanitation (SDG 6), and ageing infrastructure (SDG 9). Unplanned or unregulated urban expansion has encroached on valuable agricultural land and reduced public and green spaces which are

Progress on SDG 11 contributes to **gender equality** and the empowerment of women and girls. In the Arab region, instability, conflict, and/or the lack of accessible, reliable and safe transport place greater limitations on women's and girls' mobility compared to that of men and boys. Threats of harassment in some areas also hinder the ability of women and girls to move freely, work and participate in public life.

In addition, cultural and social norms, prevailing customary laws, the complexity of land registration and a lack of information often prevent women from exercising their rights with regard to ownership of land and property.

Approximately 60 per cent of **solid waste** in Cairo is managed by formal and informal entities, while the rest is dumped illegally, causing serious ecological and public health problems.

Source: United Nations, 2017.

necessary for social and physical well-being. Combined, these different challenges limit the safety, mobility and rights of everyone, with extra burdens for vulnerable groups such as women, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants, youth and children.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 11 IN THE ARAB REGION

**The main barrier is the absence of integrated, people-centred strategies to manage land, resources and rising urbanization.**

This barrier has multiple dimensions.

#### Unaffordable housing

All countries in the region suffer from a shortage of affordable housing. The price of urban land is high and appreciates rapidly, and supply in dense settlements is limited. The private sector caters mainly to upper-middle income clients and demands for luxury housing. Low-income housing programmes cannot keep up with needs for affordable housing; the informal housing sector fills the gap. A large population of young people coupled with high levels of youth unemployment and often legal barriers to mortgage lending exacerbate unaffordability.



### Inadequacy of basic services

Access to water and sanitation services varies widely in overcrowded and/or underserved cities and neighbourhoods. Solid waste in the region is expected to exceed 250 million tons per year by 2050,<sup>15</sup> yet many cities have not adopted integrated solid waste management practices, a shortfall that is already leading to urban and environmental crises. The use of clean energy varies but remains limited across the region.



### Inefficient public transport

Current urban planning in the region remains largely car-oriented and does not yet value the design of neighbourhoods to reduce vehicular traffic. In addition, public transport remains widely used in most cities but is in decline due to unreliability and/or low levels of comfort. Informal public transport fills the gap. The sustainability of transport remains a challenge; the sector is a major contributor to climate emissions and air pollution.



### Strained mobility or lack of access for persons with disability

Persons with disabilities in all Arab countries face physical barriers to their mobility, such as high curbs, narrow doorways, a lack of audible street signals, and so on. This severely limits their access to different spaces and institutions, and entrenches their social, economic, environmental, cultural and political exclusion.



Other barriers include:

### Conflict

Conflict has weakened the rule of law and the ability of states to provide basic services and spurred the spread of informal housing and land grabs. Camps for refugees and displaced persons are overcrowded, threatening safety and security, and basic services such as sanitation are substandard, leading to outbreaks of disease.

Conflict has also accelerated the destruction and/or deterioration of cultural and urban heritage in a number of cities, sometimes deliberately so, as in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. The physical destruction of urban areas has torn apart communities and cut social ties. In many instances, conflict and its aftermath result in the segregation of groups and neighbourhoods along sectarian or ethnic lines.



### Vague, obsolete and/or cumbersome property registration and titling processes

They are a critical secondary barrier to achieving SDG 11. They undercut the ability to afford housing, use land productively, and secure the use and ownership of land and homes. The absence of clear and proper records as well as complicated processes to transfer titles impinge on the ability, especially among women, to access property and financing services (SDG 5).

Countries experiencing conflict often have outdated or ill-maintained records, a situation rendered worse by displacement and the destruction of housing, land and property documents. The result is increased social fragmentation and worsened insecurity.



Historic districts are not only part of the daily life of the population, but a significant economic asset, attracting tourists. Recognizing a shared **cultural heritage** also strengthens social cohesion. Algeria's National Scheme of Land Planning 2030 includes the protection and preservation of cultural heritage as a main pillar.

Source: People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, 2014.

## At risk of being left behind

Prohibitive land and property prices squeeze out **the poor and less well-off**, forcing them into informal, often unsafe housing in neighbourhoods with limited or inadequate essential services. The poor have little access to open, clean and green public spaces as these are concentrated in wealthy neighbourhoods. Gated communities and semi-private spaces that charge fees for entry are trends that cement social fragmentation and exclusion.

Strategies to build **resilience to disasters** must be attuned to socioeconomic inequalities in cities and elsewhere, and resources must be allocated accordingly. Overall, the region's relatively low number of disaster-related deaths and limited economic losses owe less to existing resilience strategies and more to a lower susceptibility to natural disasters than other parts of the world.

The poor, who can include rural-urban migrants, urban refugees and the internally displaced, and people in general living in slums or inadequate dwellings, are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change as well as natural and human-caused disasters.

The inability to move freely and access different spaces in cities, given the lack of accommodation for their needs, isolates **people with disabilities**. They are unable to get jobs, attend social and cultural events, engage with others, enjoy healthy green spaces and so on. Around three-quarters of people with disabilities in both Morocco and the State of Palestine cannot access public transportation because of a lack of accommodation.<sup>16</sup>

Creating inclusive spaces for persons with disabilities benefits other vulnerable groups or those with special needs, such as **older persons and small children**.

**Refugees, returnees and the internally displaced** often face discrimination. As they may be hidden or in hiding, their needs are not properly assessed. They also suffer

“My Community...A City for Everyone” was launched in **Dubai** in 2013 as an integrated initiative to tackle **social stigma around disability** and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. The Dubai Road and Transport Authority has a critical role in transforming facilities, services and public vehicles to make them accessible for all.

Source: Government of Dubai, 2016.

from the destruction of supportive social networks and intermittent or no access to services. In Lebanon, an estimated 73 per cent of all non-Palestinian refugees live in rented spaces, a marker of insecure accommodation. A third of refugee households in Lebanon can be classified as overcrowded; families often share lodgings. An estimated 18 per cent live in tents in informal settlements, while 9 per cent occupy structures considered non-residential, such as garages, shops, worksites and farm buildings.<sup>17</sup>

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 11

The improvement of governance, land and property management and administrative frameworks, and access to affordable land and housing are all required in urban and rural areas.

### 1. Introduce and strengthen people-centred urban planning:

- Connect rural and urban development strategies so they are complementary and equally address the needs of diverse populations.
- Adopt land management strategies at the city and national levels in alignment with social and environmental as well as economic development, and ensure access and affordability, the adequacy of social and green spaces, and sustainable land use.
- Invest in and prioritize healthy cities and ensure multisectoral approaches linking urban, health and environmental sustainability policies.
- Introduce laws and mechanisms to increase the safety and mobility of women and girls, and protect against harassment in public spaces.
- Prioritize participatory urban governance, including through mechanisms for citizen engagement in decision-making.
- Empower local governments and push for the decentralization of decision-making and resource allocation.
- Foster the development of smart applications to enhance inclusivity in sectors such as transportation, health, education and other services.

### 2. Enhance the collection of data at the national and local levels:

- Build capacities for data collection in cities, including to feed data into national statistical systems.
- Allocate adequate financial resources for municipalities to monitor urban development at the local level.
- Establish local and national urban observatories to analyse the state of urban development, its impact on different social groups, and links with sustainability and inclusion.
- Increase the use of smart technology, GIS, satellite imagery and big data to fill local data gaps.

### 3. Invest in accessibility for all:

- Invest in making cities and human settlements physically accessible to all, including women, people with disabilities, older persons, young people and children. This includes retrofitting buildings, improving the accessibility of public transport and other infrastructure, and adequately allocating public spaces and green areas.

#### 4. Ensure sustainability through regulation and technical expertise:

- Regulate public and private transport, improve infrastructure to ensure sustainability, and build technical expertise on new technologies for producing cleaner fuel while upgrading fuel specifications.

#### 5. Enforce and protect housing, land and property rights for vulnerable groups:

- Eliminate discriminatory laws, and enhance enforcement and access to justice for women, minorities, internally displaced people, returnees and others.
- Reform land titling and registration mechanisms, and mainstream and simplify procedures.

- Enhance equitable access to natural resources, including land among different social groups and communities, and protect against displacement and eviction.
- Introduce mechanisms to increase women's access to financial resources including mortgages.

#### 6. Prioritize inclusive urban planning and land management in reconstruction efforts in conflict and post-conflict countries:

- Ensure citizen-led recovery and reconstruction, and engage youth as much as possible.
- Preserve and protect natural and cultural heritage at risk, and restore damaged and destroyed tangible and intangible heritage.

## SDG 11 targets and indicators in the Arab region

### Target

### Indicator

### Data

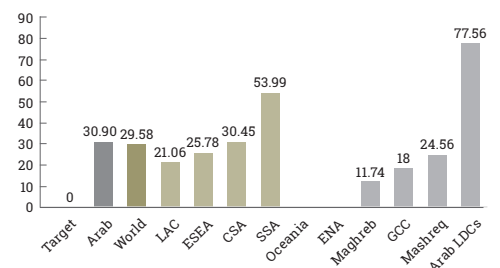
#### 11.1

By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

#### 11.1.1

Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing

Figure 1 Proportion of the urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (percentage)



Note: Data on this indicator are only "available for all developing countries, as it has been reported yearly by UN-Habitat in the MDGs' reports" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), which explains the lack of data. All means are weighted by total urban population for 2014 (United Nations Population Division, 2017b; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2014: Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

#### 11.2

By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

#### 11.2.1

Proportion of population that has convenient access to public transport, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.3**  
By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

**11.3.1**  
Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.3.2**  
Proportion of cities with a direct participation structure of civil society in urban planning and management that operate regularly and democratically

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.4**  
Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

**11.4.1**  
Total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage, by type of heritage (cultural, natural, mixed and World Heritage Centre designation), level of government (national, regional and local/municipal), type of expenditure (operating expenditure/investment) and type of private funding (donations in kind, private non-profit sector and sponsorship)

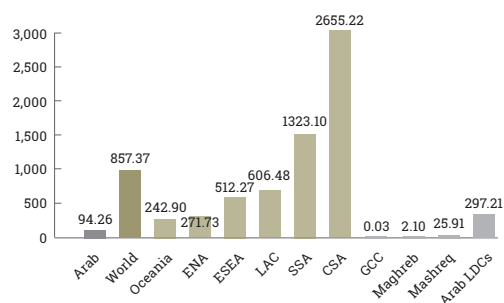
Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.5**  
By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

**11.5.1**  
Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people

Figure 2 Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people

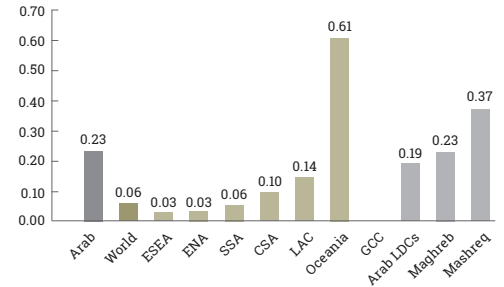
(a) Number of people affected by disaster per 100,000 people



Note: The number of people affected by disaster is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017a; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Sudan (2017).

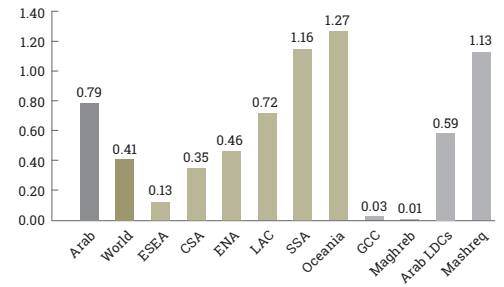


(b) Number of deaths due to disaster per 100,000 people



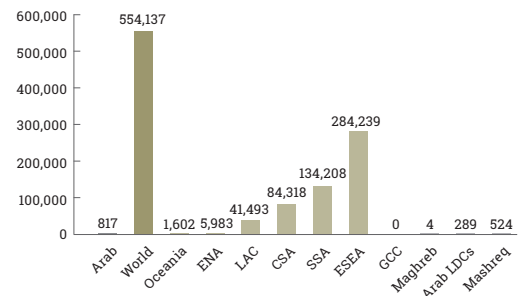
Note: The number of deaths due to disaster is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017a; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Lebanon (2016), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan and State of Palestine (2017).

(c) Number of missing persons due to disaster per 100,000 people



Note: The number of missing persons due to disaster is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to get total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017a; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Tunisia (2009), Jordan and Yemen (2010), Djibouti and Morocco (2011), Comoros (2017).

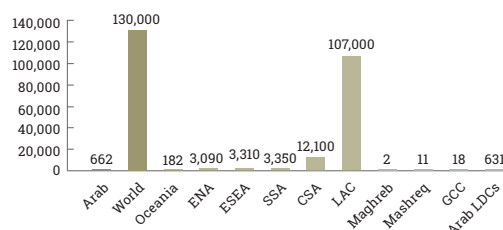
Figure 3 Sum of the numbers of damaged and destroyed dwellings attributed to disasters



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Djibouti (2012), State of Palestine and Tunisia (2013); Comoros, Lebanon and Morocco (2014), Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Somalia (2017).

**11.5.2**  
 Direct economic loss in relation to global GDP, including disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services

**Figure 4** Direct economic loss attributed to disasters (millions of current United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Djibouti and Kuwait (2011), Comoros and Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Sudan (2017).

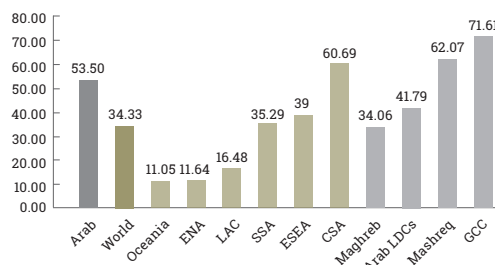
**11.6**  
 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

**11.6.1**  
 Proportion of urban solid waste regularly collected and with adequate final discharge out of total urban solid waste generated, by cities

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.6.2**  
 Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (e.g. PM2.5 and PM10) in cities (population weighted)

**Figure 5** Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter in cities



Note: All means are weighted by total urban population for 2016 (United Nations Population Division, 2017b; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2016 except the State of Palestine.

This indicator represents "the mean annual concentration of fine suspended particles of less than 2.5 microns in diameters (PM2.5), which is a common measure of air pollution. The mean is a population-weighted average for urban population in a country and is expressed in micrograms per cubic meter [ $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ]" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).

**11.7**  
 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

**11.7.1**  
 Average share of the built-up area of cities that is open space for public use for all, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**11.7.2**  
 Proportion of persons victim of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

<p><b>11.a</b> Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, per-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning</p>	<p><b>11.a.1</b> Proportion of population living in cities that implement urban and regional development plans integrating population projections and resource needs, by size of city</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>11.b</b> By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2030-2015, holistic disaster risk management at all levels</p>	<p><b>11.b.1</b> Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030</p> <p><b>11.b.2</b> Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p> <p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>11.c</b> Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials</p>	<p><b>11.c.1</b> Proportion of financial support to the least developed countries that is allocated to the construction and retrofitting of sustainable, resilient and resource-efficient buildings utilizing local materials</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) for the following indicators: 11.5.1 [Number of people affected by disaster (number); Number of deaths due to disaster (number); and Number of missing persons due to disaster (number)] and 11.5.2 [Direct economic loss attributed to disasters (millions of current United States dollars)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. UN-Habitat, 2012.
2. Ibid.
3. United Nations Population Division, 2018.
4. Slums are "(r)epresented by the urban population living in households with at least one of the following four characteristics: lack of access to improved drinking water; lack of access to improved sanitation; overcrowding (three or more persons per room); and dwellings made of non durable material" (UN-Habitat, 2003).
5. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1. For more details on the country level, refer to the annex complementing this report.
6. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2018; UNHCR, 2018b; UNRWA, 2018. Note that data on refugees include people referred to by UNHCR as "refugees and people in refugee-like situations". Data on Palestinian refugees under the mandate of UNRWA are not included in UNHCR data.
7. United Nations, 2017.
8. Ibid.
9. WHO, 2018.
10. ESCWA, 2018.
11. The Economist, 2016; ESCWA, 2018. Regional country groupings are per the references.
12. Calculated by ESCWA based on IEA, 2019.
13. World Bank, 2019, pp. 27-28.
14. UN-Habitat estimation as of 2019.
15. Kaza and others, 2018, p. 59.
16. ESCWA, 2017; Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development, 2014.
17. UNHCR, 2018a.

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## SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

SDG 12 encapsulates the entire sustainable development paradigm at the local, national, regional and global levels. In the Arab region, the urgent need to address unsustainable consumption and production patterns is clearly reflected in trends such as increasing water scarcity, rapidly rising energy use and associated greenhouse gas emissions, escalating generation of waste, very low levels of reuse and recycling, and worsening air and water pollution. Several countries have recently adopted national sustainable consumption and production plans, a step in the right direction. Major adjustments to incentives driving unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are needed, however. Progress requires transforming from a focus on economic growth alone to an embrace of sustainable development, mobilizing and regulating the private sector to support such a transformation, and engaging communities and individuals in steering this paradigm shift.

### Key facts

#### +60%

Domestic material consumption per capita in the Arab region increased by over 60 per cent from 1990 to 2015, coming close to the global average.<sup>1</sup> This reflects a rapid increase in the consumption of raw biomass, fossil fuels and minerals.

#### Energy subsidies 7.3% of GDP

Energy subsidies in the region are quite significant at around 7.3 per cent of GDP in 2017, well above the global average of 6.5 per cent. Levels are particularly high in the GCC subregion, up to 14.34 per cent in Saudi Arabia.<sup>4</sup>

#### Material footprint

Material footprint per capita was at only one half of the global average in 2017, reflecting slower growth in the need for materials across the whole supply chain to service final demand.<sup>2</sup>



In a region suffering from water scarcity, domestic water consumption per capita has declined marginally over the past decade, but it was slightly higher than the global average in 2014.<sup>5</sup>

#### GCC

Domestic material consumption per capita is particularly high in the GCC subregion, at 2.5 to 3 times the global average, reflecting higher incomes and consumption rates. All other subregions are generally well below global averages.<sup>3</sup> The material footprint is also higher in GCC countries.



The proportion of people serviced by municipal waste collection ranges from 100 per cent in three GCC countries<sup>6</sup> to 67 per cent in Iraq and only 19 per cent in Yemen.<sup>7</sup> Significant urban-rural inequalities exist.<sup>8</sup>



Municipal waste collected per capita was well above the global average in 2012, with very high levels in both the Mashreq and GCC subregions.

#### 70%



Per capita energy consumption in the region increased by close to 70 per cent from 1990 to 2014, outstripping rapid population growth. Energy consumption in GCC countries was very high, at close to four times the global average.



With the exception of the United Arab Emirates at 15 per cent, the percentage of municipal waste recycled is 10 per cent or less in the eight Arab countries<sup>9</sup> that have reported this figure.<sup>10</sup>

## 7 Arab countries

The Arab Regional Strategy for Sustainable Consumption and Production was adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment in 2009. At least seven countries<sup>11</sup> have adopted national sustainable consumption and production action plans or similar documents<sup>12</sup> targeting sectors such as energy, water, agriculture, industry and tourism.

## International chemical conventions

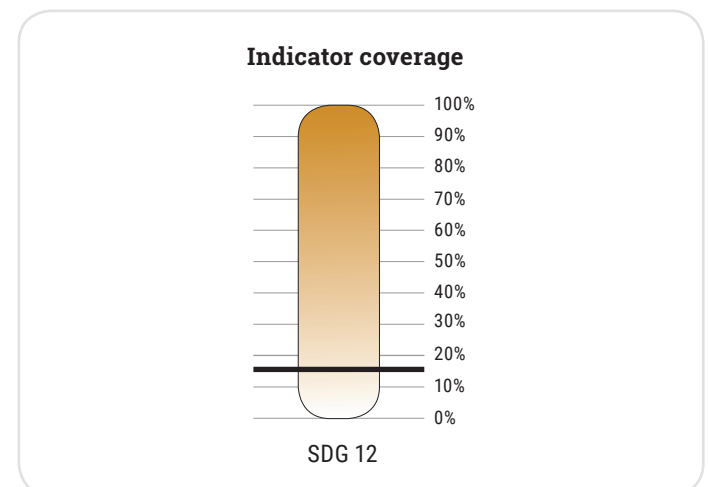
The Arab region lags behind the global average for compliance on key international chemicals conventions. Only the GCC subregion shows more compliance.<sup>13</sup>

## Measuring SDG 12 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 2 out of 13 indicators,<sup>14</sup> covering 2 out of 11 targets under SDG 12.

SDG 12 targets focus primarily on intersections between economies and the environment, including resource consumption, waste and pollution. Several targets and indicators link to global environmental agreements, for example, relating to the safe management of chemicals (the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions) as well as the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns.

Out of 13 indicators, nine were categorized as tier III in 2018, meaning that methodologies remain under development. No data are available to set baselines on these indicators for Arab countries. Data availability is very poor overall. The lack of data represents a considerable challenge to measuring progress on Goal 12. Several indicators from closely related goals do have good data, however. These include renewable energy (7.2.1), energy efficiency (7.3.1), carbon dioxide per unit of value added (9.4.1), collection of urban waste (11.6.1), air pollution (11.6.2) and water pollution (3.9.2).



A range of other complementary national indicators can help fill data gaps in the short term and enable an initial assessment of progress. In many Arab countries, data are readily available for indicators on the consumption of natural resources (e.g., per capita water and energy consumption), per capita waste generation and per capita greenhouse gas emissions.

### SDG 12 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

**TARGET 12.4** - The environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks,

and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

## The main barriers to ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns in the Arab region

SDG 12 connects all countries, developed and developing. The global interdependence of consumption and production patterns means that change everywhere is necessary to achieve transformation anywhere. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities will be critical to transformation in the Arab region, given significant historical variations in consumption and production patterns between regions. All actors—governments as well as businesses, civil society and individuals—have a responsibility to support this transformation at local, national, regional and global levels.

Unsustainable consumption and production are embedded in economic structures, production systems and processes, technologies, institutional settings and incentives, and the behaviour of producers and consumers. Such patterns drive climate change, resource depletion, land degradation and desertification, waste generation, vehicle congestion, and air and water pollution, and they impact human health in the region.

Action taken to achieve sustainable consumption and production has the potential to be transformational. Well-designed national policy frameworks and instruments could enable fundamental shifts in these patterns<sup>15</sup> by changing the course of economic and social development. Multiple benefits could accrue,

including in agriculture (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3), water efficiency (SDG 6), energy efficiency (SDG 7), resource consumption (SDG 8), infrastructure and industry (SDG 9), the environmental impact of cities (SDGs 11 and 15), and climate change (SDG 13). Sustainable consumption and production therefore demand action on education for sustainable development and lifestyles (SDGs 4 and 13), increasing the share of renewable energy, enlarging investment in research and development and encouraging innovation, and improving the management of cities.

In 2015 in **Lebanon**, the Naameh landfill in southern Beirut, which was overflowing with waste, closed due to pressure from the local population living around the site. Without any clear alternative, garbage began to pile up on the streets of Beirut, exacerbated by very low levels of recycling.

Creating a master plan will be essential to developing the right infrastructure and defining the best investments in resolving Lebanon's waste crisis. Increased recycling through behaviour change and collection initiatives are important early steps. Waste-to-energy is also part of an integrated solution.

Source: Stella and others, 2018.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 12 IN THE ARAB REGION

The main barrier to achieving SDG 12 in the region is a global one as well: **the absence of a fundamental, cross-cutting change to patterns of consumption and production, or a global shift in the entire paradigm of economic growth and development.**

Other barriers in the region vary across countries and sectors. Addressing them helps bring the region closer to realizing the transformative shift of SDG 12.

#### A linear economic model is still dominant

The take, make, use, dispose approach to production depletes natural resources and generates waste and emissions. In sectors such as construction, manufacturing and food production, material use during production is generally not optimized, product life is not maximized, and waste from the production and post-consumption phases is not reused. There are limited incentives in place to encourage the private sector to adopt more sustainable practices. A shift to a circular economy model could pay significant dividends, however. For example, GCC countries alone could save \$138 billion by 2030 by adopting a circular model in sectors such as chemical production, construction of buildings and infrastructure, and clean mobility and transport systems.<sup>16</sup> These concepts need to be operationalized through comprehensive national frameworks.



#### Heavy reliance on resource extraction

In some GCC and Maghreb countries, diversification into less resource-intensive sectors (SDG 8) has been limited. The region holds the world's largest reserves of crude oil and is the largest producer of fossil fuels, and they are an important factor in regional economic growth. Decoupling economies from resource consumption while global demand for such resources continues to grow is challenging, especially in the absence of political commitment to change the understanding and planning of economic growth.





### High costs and other resource constraints limit the adoption of sustainable, efficient technologies and practices



High costs and other resource constraints are evident in infrastructure (buildings, energy, water, transport), industry, agriculture and the production of household appliances as well as in the delivery of key services such as waste and sanitation. For example, an estimated 80 per cent of municipal solid waste in the region is decomposable organic matter or recyclable materials.<sup>17</sup> But most of this waste ends up in unsealed landfills. Recycling rates remain low, at generally less than 10 per cent and often much lower.<sup>18</sup> Further, compostable solid waste is often mixed with industrial and hazardous medical wastes during collection and disposal, which results in contamination and limits sustainable treatment options. Some countries have prototyped waste-to-energy technologies using incineration and anaerobic digestion, but such practices have not been scaled up due to high costs and low technical capacity.

### Lower political priority



Lower political priority is given to sustainable production and consumption measures, which limits their impact. Despite being closely linked to benefits for economic development and a broad range of productive sectors, sustainable consumption and production measures are often perceived as an environmental management issue to be administered by environmental ministries with limited resources and influence. More work is needed to ensure that the private sector is actively engaged, and that public-private partnerships, especially in resource management and service delivery, support a transformative shift to more sustainable consumption and production patterns.

### Inefficient subsidies, pricing and cost recovery measures



Inefficient subsidies, pricing and cost recovery measures contribute greatly to unsustainable production and consumption of energy and water resources. Energy subsidies are some of the highest in the world. Artificially low prices for water services effectively subsidize consumption, and result in inefficiency and overuse.<sup>19</sup> Given the scarcity of freshwater, many countries rely on desalination and/or groundwater pumping, which are expensive and energy and emissions intensive. Low service fees and lack of cost recovery for waste management operations strain national budgets and limit sustainable practices.

### Lack of education and awareness



Lack of education and awareness of sustainable production and consumption, including related to food and diets, resource and waste minimization, and reuse and recycling, further hamper progress on SDG 12. Diets are increasingly unhealthy, based on overconsumption and result in obesity and diet-related health problems. Food loss and waste are prevalent (SDG 2), driven by deficient post-harvest practices; inappropriate technologies for handling, transporting and processing food; inadequate transport and other infrastructure; rodent and pest infestation during storage; and insufficient refrigeration.<sup>20</sup>

Since 2009, the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing of Dubai has supported the **tourism sector** to reduce its energy consumption by 17 per cent and water consumption by 14 per cent. Carbon dioxide emissions have declined by 688,000 tons. Hotels are encouraged to increase green areas and include local species among their plants.

Source: UNWTO, 2018.

The **Sudan's intended nationally determined contributions** to mitigating climate change highlight a range of sustainable consumption and production measures to increase access to electricity and support rural electrification, and improve energy efficiency, forest coverage and waste management services. This requires the adoption and roll-out of modern, clean technologies, including wind, solar, geothermal, hydro and waste-to-energy, as well as natural gas generation, compact fluorescent and LED lamps, efficient appliances and sanitary landfills with treatment and recycling facilities. The estimated cost of mitigation measures is \$11.7 billion. An additional \$1.2 billion is flagged for climate adaptation measures. While the Government will contribute, considerable international financial support will be needed to implement these measures.

Source: The Republic of Sudan, 2015.

## At risk of being left behind

Given the interdependence of sustainable consumption and production patterns across regions, countries and communities, the failure to progress on SDG 12 will have negative consequences for all. Some countries and groups are more vulnerable to these consequences, however, even as they have more limited prospects to participate in—and benefit from—a transformative shift in consumption and production.

**The least developed countries** in the Arab region are at a particular disadvantage, given resource and capacity constraints. For them, a step such as adopting stringent environmental standards might place unrealistic demands upon relatively weak economies, dragging down productivity, growth and incomes. These countries need substantial technical support and financial assistance to move towards clean, modern technologies and practices that help achieve sustainable consumption and production.

**Poor communities in informal and unplanned settlements** usually experience low levels of service delivery, including for water, electricity and waste collection. Such communities bear the brunt of pollution from waste and landfill sites, and in water and air. Conventional, modern, technological solutions to solve such problems are typically centralized, capital-intensive and top-down, however. They often do not take into account the voices or needs of the large number of informal workers in informal settlements (for example, in the waste sector) and the impacts on their livelihoods and health.

Sustainable consumption and production will require transitions in agriculture, industry, energy, construction

and transport. Labour markets will shift, and new employment opportunities will arise. As these are often male-dominated industries, however, changes may not result in immediate benefits for women, given gender segregation in labour markets. Women are more highly concentrated in low value-added jobs. Many informal workers in waste collection and recycling are **women and children**, and they are exposed to several health risks. The higher-tech nature of future job opportunities will require greater levels of education that are out of reach for a disproportionate share of women, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. And even though female enrolment in STEM fields tops 60 per cent in some universities, this still does not translate into employment.<sup>21</sup> Levelling structural inequalities in education and employment requires addressing the primary driver—gender discrimination.

The National Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production of the **State of Palestine** focuses on agriculture and food, tourism, and housing and construction. The plan was developed through a widely consultative process, involving the Government, NGOs, the private sector and academia. One of the key criteria used to prioritize and fund initiatives was the increased inclusion of marginalized populations such as women and youth. Initiatives have included extension services targeting Bedouin women farmers and the expansion of school health programmes to emphasize children's nutrition and awareness of healthy food choices.

Source: Environment Quality Authority of Palestine, 2016.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 12

SDG 12 requires the commitment and action of different actors, including governments and the private sector, as well as changes to behaviours and practices in many arenas. Critical to its achievement is an overhaul of economic planning (SDG 8) to take into account social and environmental dimensions, and the sustainability of consumption and production.

### 1. Establish national policies and incentive frameworks for sustainable consumption and production:

- Adopt national action plans and mainstream sustainable consumption and production into existing national strategies and plans, particularly for industry, agriculture, energy, water, transport, health and waste.
- Reduce and phase out inefficient subsidies, and address inadequate pricing and cost recovery mechanisms for essential services such as water and waste management.
- Enhance public-private partnerships, and create incentives for efficiency improvements and investment in modern, sustainable technologies in energy, water, waste and transport. This could include a mix of measures such as rebates, reduced taxes, more targeted subsidies, price signals, access to water rights/tradeable water permits and other incentives.
- Introduce integrated solid waste management strategies focusing on preventative waste management: reduce waste (waste minimization, changing habits); reuse and recycle (separate

collection systems, recycling centres); recovery (waste-to-energy technologies); and residual management (final disposal, landfilling).

- Introduce regulations and incentives to support circular economy practices, including to optimize resource inputs, maximize product use, and recover by-products and waste. This could include initiatives to build national capacities to better absorb and replicate clean technologies and integrate resource efficiency and cleaner production in national policies.

## 2. Improve knowledge to inform policies and change behaviours in line with sustainable consumption and production:

- Strengthen the science-policy interface to inform planning and implementation across the SDGs, and enhance the contributions of academics and researchers to policy discussions as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Close the extensive data gaps that hinder informed policy and planning responses, and set baselines and monitor progress on SDG 12 indicators. Waste and chemicals management should be targeted for improved data collection as a matter of urgency.

- Increase public awareness, education and technical training related to sustainable consumption and production technologies, and practices such as waste reduction and minimization, recycling and composting, and sustainable and nutritious diets.
- Integrate sustainable development and associated behavioural change into school curricula at all levels.
- Strengthen the role of local communities in developing recycling and waste policies.
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation capacity at all levels to guide the transition to more sustainable consumption and production, and ensure compliance with regulations.

## 3. Mobilize regional and global support to transfer technology to the least developed countries:

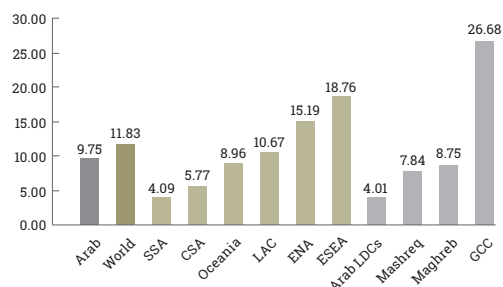
- Increase access of least developed countries to needed expertise and finance to achieve sustainable economic growth and identify opportunities for green growth.

# SDG 12 targets and indicators in the Arab region

Target	Indicator	Data
<p><b>12.1</b> Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, all countries taking action, with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development and capabilities of developing countries</p>	<p><b>12.1.1</b> Number of countries with sustainable consumption and production (SCP) national action plans or SCP mainstreamed as a priority or a target into national policies</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional aggregate are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.2</b> By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources</p>	<p><b>12.2.1</b> Material footprint, material footprint per capita, and material footprint per GDP</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

**12.2.2**  
**Domestic material consumption, domestic material consumption per capita, and domestic material consumption per GDP**

**Figure 1** Domestic material consumption per capita (metric tons)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017 and United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries in 2017 except the State of Palestine. According to the SDG Indicators Metadata Repository, "Domestic Material Consumption (DMC) is a territorial (production side) indicator reporting the apparent material consumption of a national economy." Further, "DMC reports the actual amount of material in an economy. A country can, for instance, have a very high DMC because it has a large primary production sector for export or a very low DMC because it has outsourced most of the material intensive industrial process to other countries" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). This indicator is the exact repetition of indicator 8.4.2.

**12.3**  
 By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses

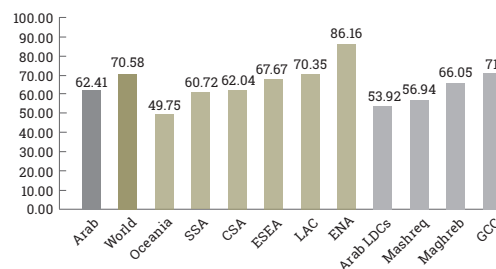
**12.3.1**  
 Global food loss index

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**12.4**  
 By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment

**12.4.1**  
 Number of parties to international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste, and other chemicals that meet their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by each relevant agreement

**Figure 2** Level of compliance with international multilateral environmental agreements on hazardous waste and other chemicals (index)



Note: An index is the simple arithmetic mean of the compliance percentage scores for the four considered conventions (the Basel Convention, the Stockholm Convention, the Montreal Protocol and the Rotterdam Convention). Global, regional and subregional aggregates of the created index are the simple means of the country values, as this is a State level indicator. The calculated Arab regional aggregate for the created index includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2015: Bahrain, Djibouti, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**12.4.2**  
 Hazardous waste generated per capita and proportion of hazardous waste treated, by type of treatment

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**12.5**  
 By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

**12.5.1**  
 National recycling rate, tons of material recycled

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

<p><b>12.6</b> Encourage companies, especially large and transnational companies, to adopt sustainable practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle</p>	<p><b>12.6.1</b> Number of companies publishing sustainability reports</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.7</b> Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities</p>	<p><b>12.7.1</b> Number of countries implementing sustainable public procurement policies and action plans</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.8</b> By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature</p>	<p><b>12.8.1</b> Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development (including climate change education) are mainstreamed in (a) national education policies; (b) curricula; (c) teacher education; and (d) student assessment</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.a</b> Support developing countries to strengthen their scientific and technological capacity to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production</p>	<p><b>12.a.1</b> Amount of support to developing countries on research and development for sustainable consumption and production and environmentally sound technologies</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.b</b> Develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products</p>	<p><b>12.b.1</b> Number of sustainable tourism strategies or policies and implemented action plans with agreed monitoring and evaluation tools</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>12.c</b> Rationalize inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption by removing market distortions, in accordance with national circumstances, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out those harmful subsidies, where they exist, to reflect their environmental impacts, taking fully into account the specific needs and conditions of developing countries and minimizing the possible adverse impacts on their development in a manner that protects the poor and the affected communities</p>	<p><b>12.c.1</b> Amount of fossil-fuel subsidies per unit of GDP (production and consumption) and as a proportion of total national expenditure on fossil fuels</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018b).

## ENDNOTES

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1. UNEP, 2019a.
2. UNEP, 2016.
3. UNEP, 2016; ESCWA, 2017.
4. IMF, 2019; IMF 2017.
5. Analysis is based on “annual freshwater withdrawals, total (billion cubic metres)” and “annual freshwater withdrawals, domestic (percentage of total freshwater withdrawal)” with data from World Bank, 2017. See also ESCWA, 2017.
6. Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates. Note that for this key fact, data are available for nine Arab countries.
7. United Nations Statistics Division, 2018c.
8. Kaza and others, 2018. The regional country grouping for this statement is defined in the reference.
9. Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, State of Palestine and Tunisia.
10. United Nations Statistics Division, 2018a.
11. These countries are: Algeria (2016), Egypt (2015), Jordan (2016), Lebanon (2015), Morocco (2015), State of Palestine (2016) and Tunisia (2016).
12. Technical assistance for developing these plans has been provided through the SWITCH-Med programme funded by the European Union and implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, UN Environment and regional centres (SwitchMed, 2017).
13. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
14. According to the methodology used in this report.
15. UNEP, 2019b.
16. Bejjani and others, 2019.
17. Al-Yousfi, 2006.
18. Data for selected countries are available from United Nations Statistics Division, 2018a.
19. AFED, 2011.
20. ESCWA and FAO, 2017.
21. Islam, 2017.

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## SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

The impact of climate change is acute in the Arab region as temperatures continue to climb. Vulnerability is on the rise as vast numbers of people confront growing water scarcity and droughts. An increase in disasters and extreme weather events takes a toll through loss of life and economic damages. While many countries are investing in climate adaptation and diversification of their economies, and adopting national disaster risk reduction strategies, more comprehensive, regional and multi-stakeholder efforts are needed. The region must strengthen the science-policy interface to tackle climate change, and better integrate climate change impact and risk assessments into planning systems.

### Key facts

**+ 1.5°C** The Arab region has experienced an average increase of 1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels.<sup>1</sup>



By 2030, the effects of climate change will reduce renewable water resources by 20 per cent as a result of decreased precipitation, increased water demand as temperatures rise, and expanding seawater intrusion into coastal aquifers due to rising sea levels.<sup>7</sup>

### 96% disaster-related deaths in LDCs

The number of annual disasters has increased since 1990.<sup>2</sup> The number of lives lost due to disasters between 2010 and 2019 was more than double the number of the previous decade. Most of these deaths (96 per cent) were in the least developed countries.<sup>3</sup>

### National development plans

While development plans in all countries cover agricultural and pastoral production, few specifically address climate change and environmental concerns.

### 44 million affected by droughts

From 1990 to 2019, droughts affected over 44 million people in the region.<sup>4</sup>

### NDCs

Twenty-one Arab countries submitted nationally determined contributions in line with the Paris Agreement on climate change, including both mitigation and adaptation measures. Seven countries (Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Sudan) did not include emissions reduction targets in their submissions.<sup>8</sup>

### \$19.7 billion

From 1990 to 2019, economic damages from disasters amounted to over \$19.7 billion. This included \$6.8 billion from earthquakes, \$5.7 billion from floods and \$6 billion from storms.<sup>5</sup>

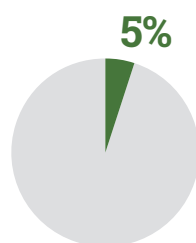
### Per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions



Projections show that climate change will reduce water availability, alter agricultural production patterns, threaten livestock production, adversely impact forests and wetlands, and increase the vulnerability of people to water scarcity, agricultural employment loss and heatwaves.<sup>6</sup>

Regional per capita emissions of carbon dioxide are increasing and were similar to the global average in 2013. In the GCC subregion, per capita emissions were almost four times the global average. Egypt and Saudi Arabia have the highest cumulative emissions in the region.<sup>9</sup>





In 2014, the region's share of global carbon dioxide emissions was less than 5 per cent. The region's share of global GDP stood at 5 per cent.<sup>10</sup>

## Climate finance

Adaptation to climate change is a priority in the region, but bilateral flows from developed countries for mitigation exceeded flows for adaptation by a factor of five in 2016. Only 5 of 22 Arab States have accessed the multilateral Green Climate Fund, which supports the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, including through the Paris Agreement.<sup>11</sup>

## Measuring SDG 13 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

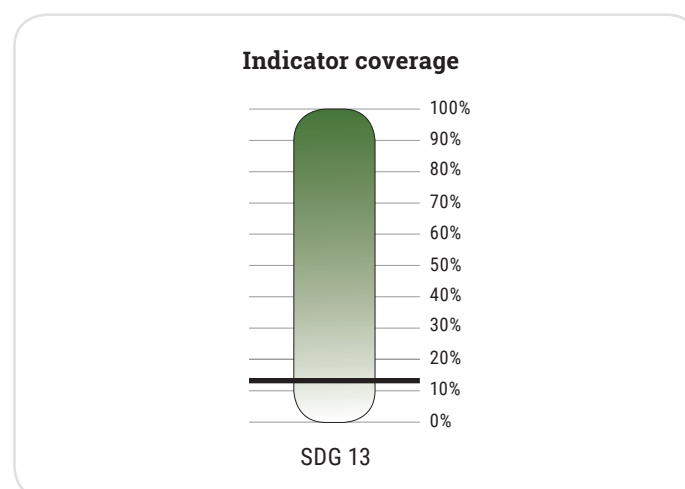
Data are available for only 1 out of 8 indicators,<sup>12</sup> covering 1 out of 5 targets under SDG 13.

The targets and indicators of SDG 13 are primarily focused on climate change resilience, planning, education and financing. There are clear links to targets and indicators for other goals, such as SDG 7, which includes targets on energy efficiency and renewable energy; SDG 9, on sustainable industrialization; SDGs 1 and 11, which have resilience indicators; and SDG 12, with targets on sustainable resource use and inefficient fossil fuel subsidies.

SDG 13 targets and indicators are linked to both the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Reporting under the Convention and the Framework offers better scope to measure the status of climate change over time. Crucial, ongoing and consolidated regional efforts to produce and share data and climate change assessments and projections have been critical, and support the efforts of Arab Governments to gauge impact, devise interventions and report on global commitments.<sup>13</sup>

A potential gap in official SDG 13 indicators is that they focus on the adoption or communication of plans and strategies, rather than the quality and content of these—or the level of commitment to them.

Another shortfall relates to the monitoring of emissions. There is only one official indicator on carbon dioxide



emissions, under SDG 9 (indicator 9.4.1 on carbon dioxide emissions per unit of value added). Adequately measuring progress on climate change action in the Arab region and elsewhere requires complementing official indicators with national indicators on total greenhouse gas emissions, per capita emissions and emissions per unit of GDP. Data on these indicators are widely available.

Indicators on finance, capacity-building and support for technology development, transfer and adoption in the area of climate change and disaster risk reduction would also help to assess needs and benefits as well as the progress of developing countries, and accelerate the achievement of SDG 13.

### SDG 13 INCLUDES ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

**TARGET 13.a** - Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly

\$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible

## The main barriers to combating climate change and its impacts on the Arab region

Despite differences among Arab countries in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, and their relatively low share of emissions globally, the region already bears heavy impacts from climate change. Existing water scarcity, increased and poorly managed urbanization, and a largely inefficient and less productive agricultural sector are among the factors accentuating the fallout.

Climate change alters the living environment and affects human health (SDG 3), prosperity (SDG 8), water availability (SDG 6) and food security (SDG 2). As populations grow across the region, climate change is exacerbating the negative impacts of migration and urbanization (SDG 11). Pollution is on the rise, and many countries have registered worrying levels on land, in oceans and the air, with direct consequences for human health. Those who are already poor and vulnerable (SDG 1), including rural people, poor women, slum dwellers, and refugees and the displaced, as well as those living in low-lying coastal areas, are most at risk from climate change and its associated disasters.

Adaptation to climate change is imperative. Mitigation efforts are also crucial, and can be advanced through economic diversification (SDG 8), and more sustainable patterns of consumption and production (SDG 12). Heavy dependence on oil in some countries makes economic diversification even more of a priority.

SDG 13 has implications for the achievement of many other SDGs and related targets, including SDG 7 (energy efficiency and renewable energy), SDG 2 (food security), SDG 9 (industrial emissions), SDG 12 (resource efficiency and fossil fuel subsidies), and SDGs 14 and 15 (healthy oceans and forests). Yet such links are not adequately reflected in development planning or sectoral strategies and policies.

Impacts from climate change are most acute in terms of water availability, with implications for agricultural production and food security. Adverse effects will be directly borne by rural communities, and the poor in rural and urban areas.

Extreme climate events such as droughts, flash floods, and sand and dust storms are on the rise in patterns not witnessed historically.<sup>14</sup> They threaten richer and poorer countries alike, impacting human lives and health, and causing serious damage to natural and human-made infrastructure and resources. The capacity of Arab countries to adapt to climate change varies considerably, with the least developed countries being particularly vulnerable.<sup>15</sup>

"In Iraq, over 60,000 impoverished farmers whose livelihoods were adversely affected by **drought** in 2006 and 2008 migrated to urban areas. Similar migration movements occurred in Jordan."

"In the Sahel zones of Mauritania, every major drought has triggered migration to the cities and nomadic households have moved by the hundreds of thousands to Nouakchott and Nouadhibou where deeper wells could reach the groundwater. Nouakchott's population grew from 40,000 to over 700,000 between 1970 and 2000."

"In Sudan, the line of semi-desert and desert areas has moved southwards 50 to 200 km since 1930 and is projected to continue moving southwards, threatening 25% of the country's agricultural land and reducing food production by 20%."

Source: United Nations 2017.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 13 IN THE ARAB REGION

### High levels of exposure and vulnerability to climate change



The high levels of exposure and vulnerability to climate change are due to key regional characteristics such as freshwater scarcity, aridity, population growth, increased urbanization, poverty and instability, fragility and conflict.<sup>16</sup> Impacts on shared water resources, increased desertification and other aspects of climate change cross national boundaries; so do related population movements. National actions related to adaptation or mitigation can also easily affect other countries.

Vulnerability is exacerbated by a lack of safe and affordable housing, inadequate urban drainage systems, disruptions in electricity, and inadequate heating and cooling. These issues are especially problematic given the rise in unplanned urbanization. Without adequate adaptation and mitigation measures, climate change is projected to continue to increase vulnerability and food insecurity in coming decades,<sup>17</sup> and fuel migration and displacement, with many more people ending up in cities.

Projected temperatures in parts of the region could rise by 5°C by the end of the century. Precipitation is largely projected to decline,<sup>18</sup> with the highest drop-off expected in the North African countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The Moroccan highlands could see a reduction in rainfall of up to 40 per cent by the end of the century.<sup>19</sup> With agricultural systems already often struggling under the strain of inefficiency and weak productivity, the likely outcome will be a spike in hunger and poverty, especially in rural areas.

### Limited adaptive capacity in many countries, and inadequate policy and planning responses



The combination of rapid population growth and urban expansion with an increased incidence of disasters driven by a changing climate presents a complex planning and development challenge.<sup>20</sup> While all countries are affected to varying degrees, those with greater financial and technical resources and sound infrastructure are better positioned to respond. More work is needed to share information, technology and capacities within the region to ensure necessary and effective infrastructure is in place across countries.

Escalating economic damage, forced resettlement and conflict over dwindling resources considerably tax the capacity of governments to deliver on development agendas, which further compounds fragility. National preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies are needed to reduce the loss and damage caused by extreme events. Adaptation strategies that build resilience in the medium and long term need to be adequately funded and implemented. In general, there is insufficient policy integration and coherence across strategies, plans and investments to address climate change and disaster risks are insufficient, and there is inadequate mainstreaming of climate change targets and policies into national development plans and visions.

### Limited technical and research capacity



Combating climate change in the region is undercut by the weak state of research and development and knowledge production. These are crucial not only to inform policymaking but also to drive a cultural transformation in awareness of and action to combat climate change.

Currently, climate change research and impact assessments are improving but have yet to gain the attention they deserve. As a result, the effects of climate change are not integrated into national and subnational sectoral planning, and urban and land-use planning. They do not explicitly inform measures to increase the resilience of health systems, infrastructure and housing, and reduce vulnerability among fragile communities and groups such as women, older persons, small farmers, migrants, and so on. Weak risk governance is a national and regional challenge. There is a need to strengthen regional cooperation on early warning systems for drought, sand and dust storms, and other extreme climate events.

### Insufficient quantity and quality of finance, technology and capacity-building support



Achieving the commitments made by developing countries in nationally determined contributions is contingent on financial support from developed countries. Yet access to and replenishment of global climate funds (e.g., the Green Climate Fund) are concerns. Funds for adaptation projects, a priority for the region, remain particularly low. Political obstacles, eligibility criteria and standards, or limited capacity in project preparation are barriers for some countries. Some countries in the region have succeeded in securing funding from the Green Climate Fund, namely Bahrain, Comoros, Egypt, Morocco and the State of Palestine. Other countries have tapped into or are seeking to access Readiness Programme funds to assist with project preparation. But they continue to cite stringent donor and investor requirements and difficulty in developing bankable proposals as obstacles to accessing finance.

In 2018, **Cyclone Mekunu** devastated Oman and Yemen. It was reportedly more powerful than any storm previously recorded in that area.

In Oman, three years of rain fell in a single day, leaving 24 people dead. When Mekunu struck Yemen's Socotra in the Arabian Sea, it caused significant damage to an island that UNESCO has recognized as a natural world heritage site. Over 500 families were displaced.

Sources: OCHA, 2018; IFRC, 2018.

Building on the 2013 Aqaba declaration on disaster risk reduction in cities, **Amman**, the capital of Jordan, has developed a resilience strategy. Five pillars address all aspects of life and the needs of the city.

The strategy emerged from the wide engagement of stakeholders from the public and private sectors, local and international civil society organizations, youth groups, academia and others, who met to discuss the city's future and draw a road map based on its potential. The strategy calls for transforming challenges into opportunities to develop the city together and ensure the well-being of its people and future generations.

## At risk of being left behind

While the impacts of climate change are and will be felt by all, some groups of people are particularly at risk.

Climate change aggravates and multiplies existing threats in poor communities. Lacking resources to adapt to changes or cope with shocks, they are likely to be most severely impacted. The **rural poor** are especially vulnerable due to their reliance on water for agriculture for their livelihoods, and inadequate infrastructure and living conditions.<sup>21</sup> Areas with the highest vulnerability and least adaptive capacity include the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the south-western Arabian Peninsula.<sup>22</sup> Across the region, in rural and urban areas, **women and children** are more likely to suffer continued losses after a disaster, including through displacement and the disruption of livelihoods and social networks.

Rapid urbanization is often either unplanned or planned without considering climate change, which results in the creation and expansion of **informal settlements** that are highly vulnerable to climate events. The destruction of natural environments that usually buffer climate change, poor building construction, inadequate drainage and wastewater management systems, and insufficient services all increase vulnerability.

Climate change is altering the natural and built environment, and established ways of using and benefiting from natural resources such as land, water, oil and others. Current patterns of consumption and

production are not sustainable. The cumulative impacts, beyond the harm caused to the poor and most vulnerable today, impose a historical injustice on the **young and future generations**. They will inherit a natural, physical and socioeconomic environment that is overall less hospitable and more unequal, with diminishing resources and higher risks to lives and livelihoods. Arab youth face an additional barrier from educational systems that leave them without the necessary knowledge and tools to mobilize around climate actions. Weak political participation and the lack of effective mechanisms for civic engagement (SDG 16) limit their chances to influence policymaking.

By 2017, the drought in **Somalia** had reduced average cereals harvests by 70 per cent, caused significant livestock deaths and left over 360,000 children acutely malnourished. Nearly 3 million people, predominantly in rural communities, are facing acute **food insecurity**. In fragile countries such as Somalia, illegal armed groups such as Al-Shabaab have increasingly attracted young people affected by drought-induced food insecurity and limited job prospects.

Sources: DFID, 2006; FSNAU-Somalia, 2017.

# What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 13

## 1. Develop coherent national responses to climate change mitigation and adaptation in line with global agreements and national circumstances:

- Develop or update national climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, and mainstream the effects and risks of climate change into sectoral plans, local and urban development and infrastructure plans, and integrated land-use planning.
- Set clear national greenhouse gas mitigation targets in line with the Paris Agreement, and adopt incentives to drive emissions reductions across the energy, transport and other sectors, recognizing the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.
- Adopt or operationalize integrated water management strategies at national and regional levels.
- Prioritize and invest in the science-policy interface to encourage understanding, develop solutions and strengthen innovation to address climate change.
- Engage and regulate the private sector as a responsible and active actor in mitigation and adaptation measures.
- Increase coherence across the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework in terms of data, implementation and reporting.

## 2. Enhance institutional and technical capacities in the region to address climate change:

- Consolidate regional efforts to support technical training and capacity-building in climate change modelling, impact assessment, risk assessment and planning, and the use of GIS, remote sensing and greenhouse gas emission inventories to support monitoring and reporting.
- Increase the capacity of planners and policymakers, at regional, national and local levels, to incorporate the results of scientific assessments of climate change impacts and vulnerability in planning decisions.
- Invest in enhancing hydrometeorological observation networks, and increase knowledge and uptake of modern observational technologies such as earth observation satellites.

## 3. Raise awareness and engage all stakeholders in transforming patterns of consumption and production, including the use of natural and other resources:

- Incorporate climate change into educational curricula in the region, and engage students and youth in addressing its causes and impacts.
- Engage women and youth in decision-making on prevention and mitigation measures, and encourage their leadership role in their communities to transform energy and water use into more sustainable patterns.
- Support innovation, empower research centres and think tanks at regional and national levels, and create or encourage mechanisms for independent monitoring and evaluation of economic and environmental policies and action.

## 4. Mobilize additional finance and technology, and accelerate capacity-building linked to climate action in the region, drawing on public and private sources:

- Increase the quality and quantity of international public climate finance flows so that they include higher shares of unconditional grants and adaptation finance.
- Enhance the region's capacity in global negotiations, and promote regional and subregional access to climate change finance, technology and capacity-building.
- Scale up access to climate change finance from multiple funds (e.g., from the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund and Global Environment Facility), multilateral development banks, bilateral sources and the private sector as well as through innovative investment instruments (e.g., green bonds and sukuk).
- Develop baselines to track climate allocations in national and subnational budgets, and evaluate actual expenditure and impact.
- Restructure energy pricing and subsidies to drive private investment in clean energy and more sustainable consumption.
- Consider pricing mechanisms to incentivize investment in greenhouse gas reductions.
- Prioritize technology transfer, especially to the least developed countries, and strengthen the position of the region in accessing and adapting new technologies and funding opportunities.

# SDG 13 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

**13.1**  
Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries

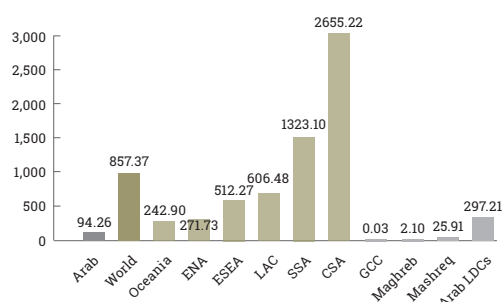
## Indicator

**13.1.1**  
Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population

## Data

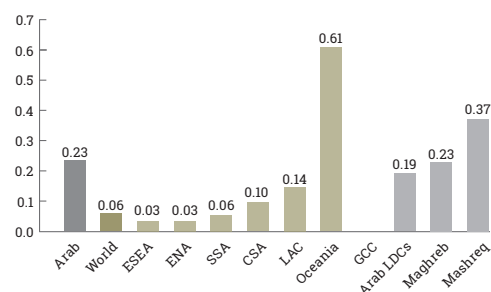
**Figure 1** Number of deaths, missing persons and persons affected by disaster per 100,000 people

(a) Number of people affected by disaster per 100,000 people



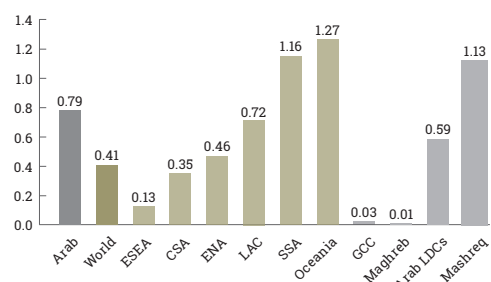
Note: The number of people affected by disasters is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to derive total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, State of Palestine and Sudan (2017).

(b) Number of deaths due to disaster per 100,000 people



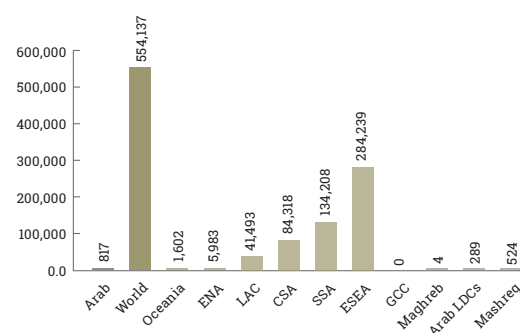
Note: The number of deaths from disasters is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to derive total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Kuwait (2011), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia (2013), Morocco (2014), Lebanon (2016), Comoros, Egypt, Jordan and State of Palestine (2017).

(c) Number of missing persons due to disaster per 100,000 people



Note: The number of missing persons due to disaster is multiplied by 100,000 and divided by population to derive total country numbers. All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), still expressed per 100,000 people. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Tunisia (2009), Jordan and Yemen (2010), Djibouti and Morocco (2011) and Comoros (2017).

Figure 2 Number of damaged dwellings and number of destroyed dwellings attributed to disasters



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2009), Yemen (2010), Djibouti (2012), Tunisia and State of Palestine (2013), Comoros, Lebanon and Morocco (2014), Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Somalia (2017).

### 13.1.2

Number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

### 13.1.3

Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

## 13.2

Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning

### 13.2.1

Number of countries that have communicated the establishment or operationalization of an integrated policy/strategy/plan which increases their ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change, and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development in a manner that does not threaten food production (including a national adaptation plan, nationally determined contribution, national communication, biennial update report or other)

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

## 13.3

Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning

### 13.3.1

Number of countries that have integrated mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning into primary, secondary and tertiary curricula

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

	<p><b>13.3.2</b> Number of countries that have communicated the strengthening of institutional, systemic and individual capacity-building to implement adaptation, mitigation and technology transfer, and development actions</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>13.a</b> Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible</p>	<p><b>13.a.1</b> Mobilized amount of United States dollars per year between 2020 and 2025 accountable towards the \$100 billion commitment</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>
<p><b>13.b</b> Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities</p>	<p><b>13.b.1</b> Number of least developed countries and small island developing States that are receiving specialized support, and amount of support, including finance, technology and capacity-building, for mechanisms for raising capacities for effective climate change-related planning and management, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities</p>	<p>Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.</p>

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) for the following indicator: 13.1.1 [Number of people affected by disaster (number); Number of deaths due to disaster (number); and Number of missing persons due to disaster (number)].



## ENDNOTES

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1. Based on the Regional Initiative for the Assessment of Climate Change Impacts on Water Resources and Socio-Economic Vulnerability in the Arab Region (RICCAR). See ESCWA and others, 2017.
2. Calculated by ESCWA based on data on the number of disaster occurrences (CRED, 2019). For more information, refer to UNDRR, 2019.
3. Calculated by ESCWA based on data on deaths due to disasters (CRED, 2019). For more information, refer to UNDRR, 2019.
4. Calculated by ESCWA based on data on people affected by disasters, by disaster type (drought) (CRED, 2019). For more information, refer to UNDRR, 2019.
5. Calculated by ESCWA based on data on total persons affected (millions) and economic damages from disasters (millions of United States dollars) (CRED, 2019). For more information, refer to UNDRR, 2019.
6. ESCWA and others, 2017.
7. ESCWA, 2018.
8. CAIT Climate Data Explorer of the World Resources Institute. See [cait.wri.org/indcs/](http://cait.wri.org/indcs/) (accessed on January 2019).
9. ESCWA, 2019b; IEA, 2019; World Bank, 2019.
10. ESCWA, 2017.
11. This refers to public international bilateral, regional and other flows reported by developed countries in their third biennial reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, submitted in 2018. It does not include multilateral flows (ESCWA, 2019a, 2019c).
12. According to the methodology used in this report.
13. See the RICCAR project (ESCWA and others, 2019).
14. See the RICCAR report (ESCWA and others, 2017) and (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2017).
15. ESCWA and others, 2017.
16. World Bank, 2014; UNDP and GEF, 2018.
17. ESCWA and others, 2017.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. World Bank, 2012.
21. World Bank, 2014.
22. ESCWA, 2017.

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**We recognize that social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of our planet's natural resources. We are therefore determined to conserve and sustainably use oceans and seas, freshwater resources, as well as forests, mountains and drylands and to protect biodiversity, ecosystems and wildlife.**

Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



## SDG 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Marine areas surrounding the Arab region are under threat from ocean warming and acidification and marine pollution from offshore and onshore development activities. A growing proportion of marine areas have reached biologically unsustainable levels of overfishing and illegal fishing. These changes threaten the health, well-being and prosperity of people across the region now and for generations to come. More informed, coherent and effective policies are needed to establish marine protected areas, and to enhance data as well as institutional and technical capacities to effectively monitor and sustainably manage marine resources and enforce associated regulations.

### Key facts

#### 27.6%

The Arab region has made some progress in establishing marine protected areas. The average proportion of marine key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas reached 27.63 per cent in 2017. This remains below the global average of 44 per cent, however, and the averages for most other regions.<sup>1</sup>



Rapid coastal development, the associated growing use of coastal and marine resources, and maritime trade through the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden significantly challenge the protection and conservation of the marine environment in the region.<sup>2</sup>

#### by 2030

The five oceans and seas that surround the region are at moderate to high risk of coastal eutrophication<sup>3</sup> by 2030, based on modelled data. The Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are at higher risk.<sup>4</sup>



Capture fisheries production has increased considerably since 1990, more than doubling in size by 2016. The Maghreb subregion reports the largest fisheries capture sector, followed by the Arab least developed countries.<sup>5</sup> The fisheries sector in Morocco accounts for 2.3 per cent of GDP and supports over half a million people.<sup>6</sup>



There are chronic gaps in regional assessments of the sustainability of fish stocks. Globally, the proportion of fish stocks that were fully depleted or overexploited increased to around 89 per cent in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

**78%  
and  
85%**

A recent regional assessment of fisheries in the Mediterranean Sea highlights that around 78 per cent of marine stocks were at biologically unsustainable levels in 2018.<sup>8</sup> A national assessment in the Arab Gulf reported an 85 per cent depletion in the stocks of two key fish species, well beyond sustainable levels.<sup>9</sup>



Fish stock assessments for other marine areas around the Arab region are limited. Reported declines in catch volumes and the average size of fish are possible indicators of overfishing.

### Marine litter

Marine litter, including plastic debris, is a growing problem in the region and globally with negative impacts on biodiversity.<sup>10</sup> In the Mediterranean Sea alone, marine litter negatively impacts more than 130 marine species.<sup>11</sup>

**0.57  
million tons  
per year**

The Mediterranean Sea, representing 1 per cent of the world's water, receives 7 per cent of the world's plastic waste (0.57 million tons per year), resulting in contaminated food chains and water, and impacting public health.<sup>12</sup>

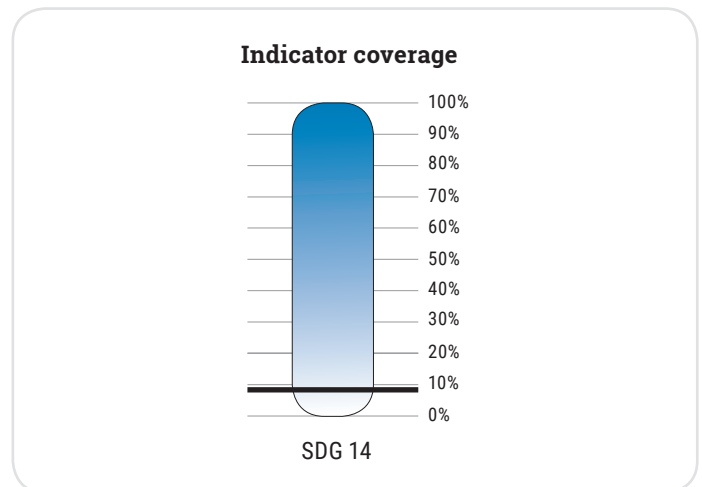
## Measuring SDG 14 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 1 out of 10 indicators, covering 1 out of 10 targets under SDG 14.

The targets cover environmental, social and economic dimensions, and are linked to other international agreements, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the World Heritage Convention and international agreements regulating fishing and marine pollution.

The availability of national data for SDG 14 indicators is very poor. Several indicators are measured at the global or regional levels by international organizations such as FAO and UNESCO. Fish stock assessments involve complex modelling; such assessments are not expected at the national level. They rely on several kinds of data, including fishery catch data that are nationally reported as well as fishing effort and biological data.

Most SDG 14 indicators are still undergoing methodological development. In some cases, available methodological notes highlight datasets to fill data gaps in the short term. For example, data on average marine acidity are regularly collected in many regions through the International Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO as well as regional and national oceanographic data centres. The Arab region, however, currently has no such data centre.



The coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas is the only indicator with national data available for the Arab region and a clear target of conserving at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas. The indicator does not capture the effectiveness of management arrangements for protected areas, however. This is an important factor in the Arab region, where marine areas may be protected under legislation, but lack effective management plans, “no-take” zones, and monitoring and enforcement arrangements to ensure sustainable management.

### SDG 14 CONTAINS FOUR TARGETS TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

Of the 10 targets of SDG 14, four are to be achieved by 2020, highlighting the urgent nature of required interventions and the potential consequences of inaction.

**TARGET 14.2** - On managing, protecting and building the resilience of ecosystems

**TARGET 14.4** - On regulating harvesting, overfishing and illegal fishing

**TARGET - 14.5** - On conservation

**TARGET - 14.6** - On the prohibition of certain forms of subsidies

### SDG 14 CONTAINS ONE TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2025

**TARGET 14.1** - On preventing and reducing pollution

## The main barriers to conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development in the Arab region

A large segment of people in the Arab region live near coastal areas. They rely on the services of marine ecosystems, which are linked to environmental health (SDGs 13 and 15) and human health (SDG 3), the tourism industry (SDG 8), as well as the fishing industry and artisanal fishing (SDGs 1 and 2). Harming these ecosystems directly impacts millions of lives and livelihoods.

Pollution and damage from land-based activities, sewage, toxic chemicals and industrial waste, oil spillage and plastics, as well as water transport activities, dredging and land reclamation (SDGs 6 and 9) are some of the leading causes of deterioration. The region also leads the world in seawater desalination, and the brine returned to sea impacts the marine environment as well as groundwater quality in karstic coastal zones.

Waters surrounding the Arab countries harbour great marine biodiversity. The Mediterranean Sea, the world's largest enclosed sea, is a hotspot of marine biodiversity with more than 17,000 reported species. One fifth are considered endemic.<sup>13</sup> The Arabian/Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman are characterized by high productivity, temperature and salinity. Yet they also support a range of coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangrove swamps, seagrass beds, coral reefs, and mud and sand flats. High biodiversity with many endemic species are also notable in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The Red Sea, the world's warmest and most saline sea, has about 1,200 coral reef species.<sup>14</sup>

Marine life has suffered from past and current conflicts in the Arab region. Damaged infrastructure and a breakdown in law and order have magnified the impacts of pollution, untreated sewage and unregulated use of coastal land and marine resources. Limitations on fishing as a result of conflict and occupation have led to overfishing in constricted areas, and increased dredging and land reclamation.

Attempts to protect biodiversity and ecosystems, and to conserve areas for current and future generations remain few and far between. Concerted efforts are needed to manage and contain human activities that pollute and damage fragile ecosystems, and deplete fish stocks.

A recent Fisheries Resource Assessment Survey in the **Arabian Gulf** completed by the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi revealed that more than 85 per cent of stocks of two key fish species were depleted. The study described the results as a conservation emergency that could result in the species' extinction. Attempts have been made to educate local fishermen on the dangers of overfishing, but monitoring is challenging.

Source: Al Wasmi, 2019.

The world's largest "dead zone" in the **Gulf of Oman** has grown dramatically in recent years. The so-called "oxygen minimum zone" is caused by warmer ocean temperatures driven by climate change, which cause bacteria to respire more, depleting oxygen supplies. Pollution may also play a role by increasing certain nutrients that cause algal and bacterial growth. The low levels of oxygen make it impossible for many creatures to survive.

Source: Queste and others, 2018.

These measures are also critical to regional and global actions to mitigate climate change.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 14 IN THE ARAB REGION

### The disconnect between economic growth and urbanization, and the sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems

Marine and coastal ecosystems are facing growing risks from habitat destruction; dredging and filling operations; production, transportation and processing of crude oil; overfishing; invasive species; pollution; ocean acidification and eutrophication; marine litter and plastic debris; brine from desalination and climate change. Many ecosystems critical to marine biodiversity, including beaches, wetlands, seagrass meadows and coral reefs, have been disrupted or depleted. Despite protection and conservation measures, including marine protected areas, many marine fish species are in danger of extinction. As an example of disjointed development, starting in the 1960s, GCC countries along parts of the Red Sea achieved an unmatched pace of development through petroleum-based economies.<sup>15</sup> But by the early 1990s, more than 40 per cent of their coasts had been modified through reclamation, resulting in significant biodiversity losses.<sup>16</sup>

Increased urbanization of coastal areas, and mismanagement or lack of regulation of waste and pollutants, in addition to the effects of climate change, have had determinantal consequences (SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12 and 13). These include impacts on food security and livelihoods (SDGs 1, 2, 3 and 8) through diminished fish stocks, which are further exacerbated by unregulated or illegal fishing or overfishing. In addition, raw discharges of sewage and inadequately treated domestic wastewater into the sea in some countries is adding pathogens and biological and chemical contamination. These spread infectious diseases and damage seafood safety.



### Complex or inadequate regional management, coordination and planning

The five oceans and seas surrounding the Arab region are each guided by specific conservation organizations and management arrangements for fisheries.<sup>17</sup> This creates a complex framework for marine management, which varies considerably in its capacity and effectiveness in the face of many pressures on the marine environment. National socioeconomic factors such as increasing catch sizes, tourism and resource extraction generally outweigh regional or national environmental considerations. Effective planning of coastal development, management of discharges and water pollution, and regulation of marine-based activities remain key challenges. Where marine parks are in place, many lack no-take zones and enforcement arrangements critical for fishery recovery.<sup>18</sup>



### Limited fish stock assessments and data



The exploitation of stocks is generally monitored through fish stock assessments, which are time and resource intensive. Assessment regularity and quality vary considerably. More sophisticated assessments are available for the Mediterranean Sea;<sup>19</sup> some national assessments have been conducted in the Arabian Gulf.<sup>20</sup> For other seas and oceans, the few available studies are dated and sporadic, with limited coverage of fish stocks and geographical areas.<sup>21</sup> The lack of assessment data makes it difficult to sustainably manage the fisheries sector.

### A lack of monitoring and enforcement capabilities related to illegal fishing



The region also lacks data to assess illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which undercuts the capacity to monitor and enforce regulations, particularly for the least developed countries. The Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing, which came into force in 2016, is regarded as an important step forward. Yet by August 2018, only five Arab countries had adhered to the agreement (Djibouti, Mauritania, Oman, Somalia and Sudan). Underreporting of fisheries capture is another key gap.<sup>22</sup>

### Climate change threats to marine biodiversity



Climate change represents an emerging threat to oceans and seas, causing warmer ocean temperatures and higher acidity resulting in the destruction of coral reefs and other impacts, such as the expansion of dead zones.<sup>23</sup> A third of marine species could become extinct in the Arabian Gulf alone by 2090 due to rising water temperatures, and changes to salinity and oxygen levels.<sup>24</sup> Human stressors such as habitat destruction and overfishing exacerbate the risks.

## At risk of being left behind

The contribution of **small-scale fisheries** to national economies in the region is relatively small. But for coastal communities, these fisheries are vital for food security, health and nutrition, income and livelihoods, and poverty alleviation, particularly in Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, the State of Palestine and Yemen. Unsustainable fishing practices, illegal fishing, depletion of fish stocks, pollution and climate change threaten the livelihoods of communities dependent on small-scale fisheries. At the same time, efforts to ensure the sustainability of fish stocks can reduce catch sizes and incomes for these communities. Such measures should operate in tandem with appropriate social and economic supports to mitigate losses and protect livelihoods.

Small-scale fisheries provide employment in related activities such as fish processing, marketing, distribution,

boat-building and net-making. **Women** are often heavily involved in the processing and trade of fish and fishery products, and globally make up 47 per cent of fisheries supply chain workers, equal to about 56 million jobs in the harvest and post-harvest sectors.<sup>25</sup> The lack of gender-disaggregated data on fishing activities in the region makes it difficult to understand the roles of women, however.

Governments in the **least developed countries** have limited institutional capabilities to protect their coastal waters from illegal fishing activities by national or foreign vessels. This can result in serious adverse consequences, such as piracy by local fisher people. They are highly vulnerable to the collapse of local fish stocks, given limited resources and alternative sources of food, income and livelihoods.

The ongoing **siege on Gaza** has severely limited the capacity of the Palestinian Government and its international partners to ensure the sustainable use of fish stocks, and reduce pollution and contamination. Infrastructure collapse from the targeted bombing of the Gaza Power Plant and other utilities has caused the failure of three sewage treatment plants, resulting in raw sewage being dumped in the sea. Continuing restrictions on the import of construction materials hampers repairs of these critical waste management facilities.

Forcing Gaza fishermen and women into shallow waters has dangerous implications for Gaza's coastal ecosystem, depleting fish stocks by increasing the exploitation of immature fish that have yet to reach breeding age. This has led to a dramatic depletion of fish stocks, with the total catch declining from around 4,000 tons in 1999 to approximately 3,305 tons in 2016. This has resulted in a surge in food insecurity in Gaza's growing population.

Source: State of Palestine, 2018.

**Overfishing and illegal fishing** off the coast of Somalia have devastated the livelihoods of coastal communities, and are regarded as the principal drivers of the outbreak of piracy. The waters off Somalia's 1,880-mile coastline are among the richest fishing grounds in the world, including shark, tuna, sardines, snapper and lobster. Somali law prohibits foreign ships from fishing within 15 miles of the coast and also bans destructive fishing methods. A lack of capacity to regulate and enforce the law, however, has enabled illegal fishing. Without a reliable source of income, many Somali fisher people have turned to piracy, attacking hundreds of cargo vessels.

Source: Brookings, 2017.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 14

The following actions are necessary to fill the gaps in regional knowledge on SDG 14 targets and indicators, and support appropriate policy responses to overcome barriers to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources.

### 1. Improve the production of knowledge, and strengthen the science-policy interface to support sustainable management,

- Improve the generation of data on the coastal and marine environment, and enhance the sharing of data and information across different institutions.
- Increase the coverage of regional assessments and data on marine resources and fisheries stocks, and the sustainability of fisheries capture activities.

### 2. Integrate marine protection and conservation into national development plans and urban development strategies in coastal areas:

- Assess the impact of pollution and damage on coastal communities.
- Enhance the efficiency of fishing to alleviate poverty in some communities while combating illegal and overfishing.
- Invest in sustainable tourism in coastal areas to generate decent work.

### 3. Improve marine fisheries management arrangements for all oceans and seas around the Arab region:

- Strengthen regional and subregional cooperation to ensure enforcement, and to enhance the capacity

of the least developed countries to regulate and enforce fishing regulations and prevent illegal fishing.

- Implement sustainable fisheries management that adopts the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

### 4. Increase marine area protection and reduce key pressures on the marine environment:

- Expand marine and coastal protected areas in the region, including through the adoption of integrated management plans with no-take zones and adequate resourcing of management, monitoring and enforcement activities, and through cooperation among Arab States.
- Enhance regulation and management of environmental impacts on oceans from urban, industrial and agricultural development, including petrochemical and energy installations, coastal chemical industry and chlorine plants, eutrophication and pollution from urban and agricultural runoff, disposal of domestic and industrial discharges, dredging and filling operations, as well as tourism.
- Adopt an integrated coastal zone management approach to plan and manage the effects of coastal development on the coastal and marine environment, as well as to evaluate and manage the potential effects of sea level rise and coastal inundation on vulnerable coastal areas as a result of climate change.



## SDG 14 targets and indicators in the Arab region

Target	Indicator	Data
<p><b>14.1</b> By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution</p>	<p><b>14.1.1</b> Index of coastal eutrophication and floating plastic debris density</p>	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.
<p><b>14.2</b> By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans</p>	<p><b>14.2.1</b> Proportion of national exclusive economic zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches</p>	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.
<p><b>14.3</b> Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels</p>	<p><b>14.3.1</b> Average marine acidity (pH) measured at agreed suite of representative sampling stations</p>	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.
<p><b>14.4</b> By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics</p>	<p><b>14.4.1</b> Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels</p>	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

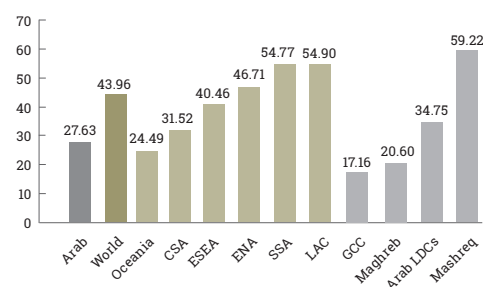
**14.5**

By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

**14.5.1**

Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas

Figure 1 Average proportion of marine key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the total marine key biodiversity area in square kilometers (i.e., the denominator) for 2016, taken from data before June 2018 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2017). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries for 2017: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

This measure "reflects trends in protected area coverage for countries or regions with few or no key biodiversity areas that are completely covered. It recognizes the extreme variation of biodiversity importance over space (Rodrigues and others, 2004), and so does not risk generating perverse outcomes through the protection of areas which are large at the expense of those which require protection" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b).

**14.6**

By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

**14.6.1**

Progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**14.7**

By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

**14.7.1**

Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**14.a**

Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

**14.a.1**

Proportion of total research budget allocated to research in the field of marine technology

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**14.b**

Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

**14.b.1**

Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**14.c**

Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of "The future we want"

**14.c.1**

Number of countries making progress in ratifying, accepting and implementing through legal, policy and institutional frameworks, ocean-related instruments that implement international law, as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for updated data for indicator 14.5.1 [Average proportion of Marine Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) covered by protected areas (percentage)] (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a).

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 1.
2. PERSGA, 2010.
3. Eutrophication is the increased primary productivity (trophy) in a water body due to enhanced availability of nutrients, generally caused by the discharge of insufficiently purified municipal wastewater and drainage from fertilized agricultural areas (Hupfer and Hilt, 2008).
4. Seitzinger and Mayorga, 2008.
5. Analysis by ESCWA based on FAO, 2017a.
6. FAO, 2017b.
7. Kituyi and Thomson, 2018.
8. FAO, 2018.
9. Al Wasmi, 2019.
10. UN Environment, 2019.
11. Deudero and Alomar, 2015.
12. Dalberg Advisors, WWF Mediterranean Marine Initiative, 2019.
13. Coll and others, 2010.
14. Gladstone, 2008; PERSGA, 2006, 2010.
15. Gladstone, 2008.
16. Hamza and Munawar, 2009; UN Environment, 2016.
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18. Guidetti and others, 2014.
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## SDG 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Biodiversity is on the decline in the Arab region; desertification is on the rise. Land degradation, deterioration of ecosystems, and loss of biodiversity, including in forests, have a progressively negative impact on human health and well-being, poverty alleviation and the natural environment. The sustainable management of land through protected areas and sustainable agriculture, along with coordinated and strategic regional planning, and greater investment in sustainable forest management and landscape restoration, are necessary to reverse the current trajectory of loss and degradation.

### Key facts



Biodiversity has declined in the Arab region as a result of rapid urbanization and land reclamation, and encroachment on fragile natural habitats.



The impact of conflicts in some countries has negatively affected land use and ecosystems including through haphazard and accelerated construction in affected host communities.



There have been significant improvements in the protection of both terrestrial and freshwater key biodiversity areas since 2000, but levels of protection remain well below global averages.<sup>1</sup>

### Extinction risk

The region's Red List Index score, which reflects the extinction risk of threatened species, is better than the world average. Biodiversity remains under pressure, however, and species are still declining.<sup>3</sup>

### 25% forest area loss

Forest area as a proportion of total land area has declined by 25 per cent in the region since 1990, primarily due to large reductions in several of the least developed countries (Comoros, Somalia and Sudan).<sup>2</sup>

### Benefits from generic resources

Progress on the adoption of legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources is mixed and often below the global average.<sup>4</sup>



Progress on sustainable forest management has been slow compared with global averages.

### 16 countries

All Arab countries are signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity. Sixteen countries have developed updated national biodiversity strategies and action plans, a promising step.<sup>5</sup>



Overexploitation of ecosystems has led to habitat loss, reduction of species and the shrinkage of their natural range of distribution.



Globally, the region is one of the most affected by sand and dust storms. These impact most Arab countries, including Algeria, Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>6</sup>

## Land degradation

The region is extremely dry, with 92 per cent of hyperarid land and 73 per cent of arable land affected by land degradation.<sup>7</sup> Water resources are scarce, with very little rainfall, which affects the natural recharging of surface and groundwater resources.

**\$9  
billion  
each  
year**

The economic cost of land degradation in the region has been estimated at \$9 billion each year (between 2 per cent and 7 per cent of the GDP of individual countries). Salinity in the soil reduces productivity and crop yields, causing economic losses estimated at \$1 billion annually across the region.<sup>8</sup>

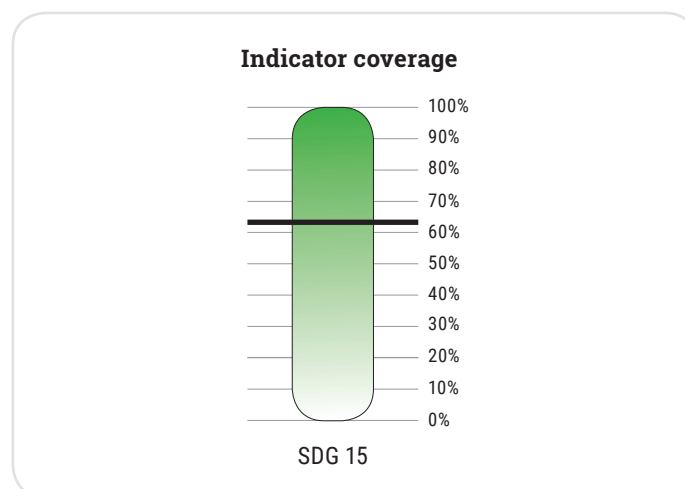
## Measuring SDG 15 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 9 out of 14 indicators,<sup>9</sup> covering 7 out of 12 targets under SDG 15.

There are currently no data for measuring progress against target 15.9, which relates to the integration of ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts. This lack indicates a critical weakness in policy efforts to achieve SDG 15.

Measuring progress on halting biodiversity loss could improve, given that all Arab countries are signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity, and most have submitted national biodiversity strategies and action plans.

Key gaps remain in assessing and tracking land degradation (target 15.3), the illegal wildlife trade (target 15.7) and measures to prevent the risk of invasive species (target 15.8). All of these targets are essential components of delivering on SDG 15, and



represent significant threats to ecosystems in the region. In particular, land degradation and desertification are major threats to biodiversity as well as food security and livelihoods, and should be prioritized for data collection and target-setting.

### SDG 15 CONTAINS FIVE TARGETS TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

**TARGET 15.1** - Ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

**TARGET 15.2** - Promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally

**TARGET 15.5** - Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

**TARGET 15.8** - Introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

**TARGET 15.9** - Integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

## The main barriers to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss in the Arab region

Terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity within them are a source of food and raw materials for construction and energy, with direct links to human well-being and prosperity (SDGs 2, 8 and 9). They provide ecosystem services such as the capture of carbon, maintenance of soil quality, provision of habitat for biodiversity, maintenance of water quality, regulation of water flow and erosion control. All of these services are necessary to maintain the health of the natural environment. They provide a buffer against natural disasters like floods and landslides, regulate the climate and maintain the productivity of agricultural systems (SDG 2).

As ecosystem services break down, human livelihoods, particularly in rural and mountainous areas, come under threat. This prompts people to migrate to cities, pressuring urban settlements (SDG 11). At the same time, increased urbanization and mismanagement of land have resulted in further land degradation and loss of green areas.

Since forests reduce the impact of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it as biomass, their deterioration affects air quality and human health (SDG 3). Forest cover has increased in some Arab countries over the past decades, yet the overall regional trend is negative. The region lost 6.3 per cent of its forest cover from 2000 to 2015.

As one of the driest areas in the world (SDG 6), the region is acutely impacted by climate change (SDG 13). This exacerbates detrimental impacts from the deterioration of ecosystems, the loss of forests and biodiversity, desertification and mismanagement of land.

There are significant barriers to addressing the continued deterioration of terrestrial ecosystems and the decline in biodiversity in the region.

The **island of Socotra** off the coast of Yemen is home to a wealth of natural wonders, with 37 per cent of plants on the island identified as endemic or unique to the area. It has been described as the “Galapagos of the Indian Ocean”. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it has been mostly spared in the Yemeni conflict, but military forces were deployed to the island in 2018, highlighting the risk it faces in the ongoing war. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has proposed adding the island to the World Heritage in Danger list given a number of key threats, including uncontrolled development, spreading invasive alien species and the impacts of climate change.

Source: UNESCO, 2019; IUCN, 2018.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 15 IN THE ARAB REGION

#### Poor regulation of land-based activities and expansion of settlements

A rapid increase in population and urbanization throughout the region as well as agricultural expansion in the least developed countries have resulted in encroachment on fragile natural habitats and the clearing of forests. Wood harvesting and intensive grazing practices are still common in some countries, leading to land degradation and desertification. Unsustainable agricultural practices, including inappropriate soil cultivation methods and unsustainable water management are other contributing factors. All of these elements reinforce each other and accelerate the negative impacts of increasing drought, and sand and dust storms. These phenomena in turn have led to declines in agriculture, which threatens food security.<sup>10</sup> Land, forest and biodiversity protection must be integrated across different sectors to ensure sustainability, health and well-being.

The implementation of existing laws and commitments, including those made through national biodiversity strategies and action plans, remains weak across the region. Outdated and ineffective legislative and management frameworks along with limited resources for biodiversity management result in a lack of monitoring and enforcement by environmental agencies.

#### A lack of political commitment and investment in biodiversity protection

The limited establishment of protected areas stems from insufficient political commitment to biodiversity protection compared with competing development imperatives. Even within protected areas networks, the coverage of key biodiversity areas is insufficient. Many smaller protected areas remain isolated, potentially limiting their conservation benefit. Management of protected areas is not prioritized in budgets, resulting in slow decline over time.





### Limited information on ecosystems as well as climate change and invasive species



Climate change is shifting habitats, altering the migration and distribution of species, and affecting the integrity of ecosystems and protection measures. Yet the impacts on biodiversity are poorly understood in terms of temperature and rainfall patterns. Poor data availability hinders the capacity to incorporate impacts in management strategies, monitor progress and changes over time, and adapt plans to meet conservation challenges. While invasive alien species are common and considered a major threat to ecosystems, accurate data on their distribution and impacts are similarly limited. These issues too are not well-addressed in management plans.

### Conflict and instability exacerbate existing pressures on the region's biodiversity



Armed conflict and post-conflict relapse pose critical challenges to biodiversity and can cause further degradation. Conflicts can take a significant long-term toll on the natural environment, including through the persistence of explosive materials such as landmines, contaminated water supplies and environmental toxicity from the destruction of infrastructure or chemical use. For example, from 2011 to 2015 in the Syrian Arab Republic, 1,880 fires reportedly burned through natural ecosystems and protected areas, with negative impacts on wildlife, clearly seen through the local extinction of the critically endangered northern bald ibis and the loss of enormous numbers of Arabian oryx in Palmyra.<sup>11</sup> Irrigated agriculture has been destroyed due to salinity related to conflict, and protected areas in some cases have been used as military staging grounds. The overgrazing of rangelands as a result of conflict has led to desertification.<sup>12</sup>

Studies estimate that 50 per cent of the region's **particulate matter 2.5**, an air pollutant, comes from natural dust. This contributes to and worsens respiratory illnesses, cancers and cardiovascular diseases, among others health threats.

Source: Karagulian and others, 2015; WHO, 2015.

**Forests in the Arab region** account for approximately 1 per cent of total world forest cover. They comprise 75 per cent natural forests and 25 per cent plantation forests. Despite increases in certain countries, there was an overall decline of 2.55 million hectares in forest cover from 2000 to 2015. Most of the losses occurred in the Comoros, Somalia and the Sudan, mainly due to expanded agricultural activities.

Source: Data are based on United Nations Statistics Division, 2015, 2019a.

## At risk of being left behind

All life on Earth is threatened by the lack of progress on SDG 15. The deterioration of terrestrial ecosystems, increased desertification and land degradation, and biodiversity loss will affect everyone in terms of health, safety, access to food, economic productivity, and peace and stability.

Resilience to change will vary, however, since some groups of people, communities and countries will be able

to access more financial or technological resources and have greater mobility.

**Rural and other subnational communities**, including mountain communities, may be at more immediate risk of being left behind. Reductions in ecosystem services, such as pollination, erosion and pest control, and water filtration, will have the greatest impacts on communities reliant on subsistence farming for their livelihoods.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 15

### 1. Raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the dangers of land degradation and loss of forests:

- Integrate the promotion of the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems in education curricula at all levels.

### 2. Invest in the strategic expansion and interconnectedness of the region's protected area network, including terrestrial, freshwater and mountainous key biodiversity areas:

- Establish national coordination groups for key biodiversity areas to improve identification and protection of important areas across the region, particularly mountain and coastal areas, and to drive growth in protected areas and bring key stakeholders together.
- Implement reforestation or habitat restoration programmes in key areas at risk of desertification or that provide wildlife corridors between protected areas and/or key biodiversity areas.
- Accelerate the adoption and implementation of national biodiversity action plans, and develop transparent mechanisms for tracking and reporting on implementation to the international community.

### 3. Introduce planning regimes to better account for biodiversity, ecosystem service provision and climate change:

- Develop, resource and implement regional climate change adaptation plans to better account for climate impacts on ecosystems, biodiversity and people.

- Adopt the "avoid, reduce, reverse" hierarchy in land-use planning decisions, as well as mechanisms to counterbalance any losses in land cover with equal or greater gains.

- Avoid expansion of settlements into prime agricultural land, forests and rangelands, and enhance integrated land use practices such as agroforestry and agrosilvopastoral systems to meet demand for raw goods sustainably and alleviate pressure on the natural environment.

### 4. Develop national ecosystem accounts and regional long-term environmental data collection and monitoring programmes to better inform decision-making, including to build on the interconnections between environmental, economic and social policies:

- Increase training and capacity-building in the compilation of ecosystem accounts and the use of GIS, remote sensing and spatial data to improve land management.
- Improve data collection on rates of desertification within the region, including data on land cover, land productivity dynamics and soil organic carbon stocks, as well as biosecurity and invasive alien species.

## SDG 15 targets and indicators in the Arab region

### Target

#### 15.1

By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements

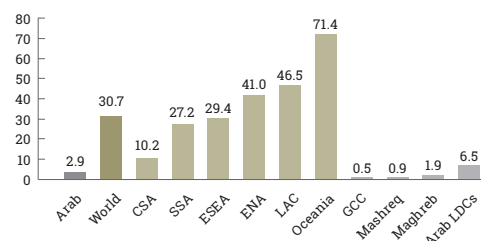
### Indicator

#### 15.1.1

Forest area as a proportion of total land area

### Data

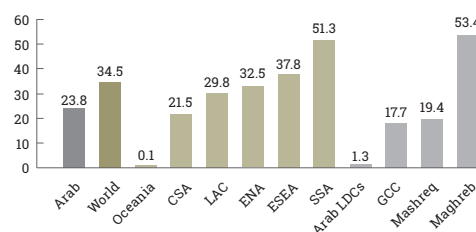
Figure 1 Forest area as a proportion of total land area (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted using total land area in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2015.

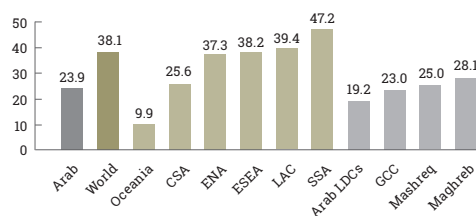
**15.1.2**  
**Proportion of important sites for terrestrial and freshwater biodiversity that are covered by protected areas, by ecosystem type**

**Figure 2** Average proportion of freshwater key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted using total land area (2015) as a proxy for the denominator (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b); see the annex complementing this report. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2017: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

**Figure 3** Average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas (percentage)

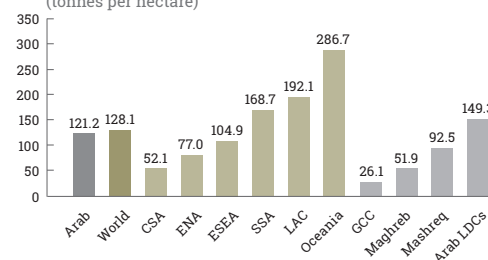


Note: All means are weighted using total land area (2015) as a proxy for the denominator (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b); see the annex complementing this report. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017.

**15.2**  
**By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally**

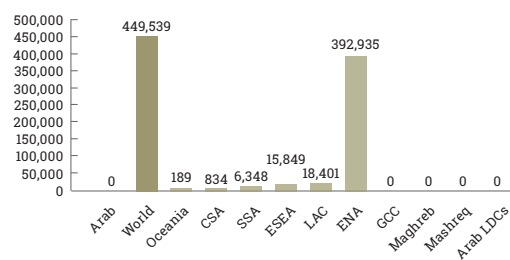
**15.2.1**  
**Progress towards sustainable forest management**

**Figure 4** Above-ground biomass in forest per hectare (tonnes per hectare)



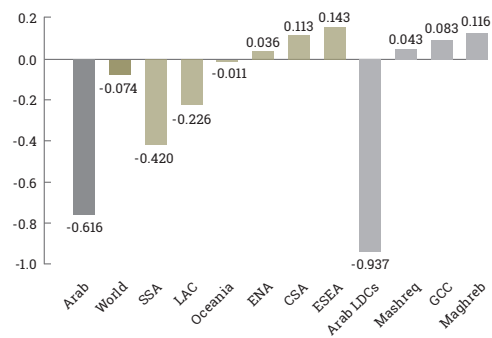
Note: All means are weighted using forest area in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2015: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**Figure 5** Forest area certified under an independently verified certification scheme (thousands of hectares)



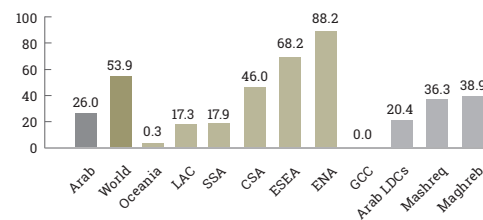
Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated regional aggregate includes the data values of all Arab countries in 2017.

Figure 6 Forest area net change rate (percentage)



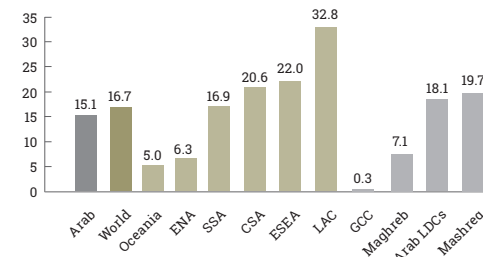
Note: The forest area net change rate for 2015 is the percentage change in forest area over the last five years, between 2010 and 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). All means are weighted using forest area in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2015: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Figure 7 Proportion of forest area with a long-term management plan (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted using forest area in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2010: Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Figure 8 Proportion of forest area within legally established protected areas (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted using forest area in 2015 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2010), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen (2015).

15.3

By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world

15.3.1

Proportion of land that is degraded over total land area

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

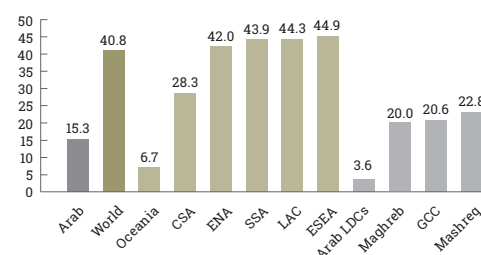
**15.4**

By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development

**15.4.1**

Coverage by protected areas of important sites for mountain biodiversity

**Figure 9** Average proportion of mountain key biodiversity areas covered by protected areas (percentage)

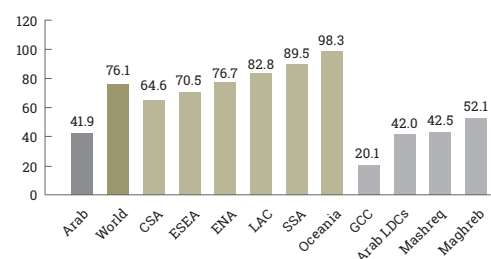


Note: All means are weighted using total land area (2015) as a proxy for the denominator (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b), see the annex complementing this report. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2017: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**15.4.2**

Mountain Green Cover Index

**Figure 10** Mountain Green Cover Index



Note: The Mountain Green Cover Index measures the size of the green vegetation in mountain areas in order "to monitor progress on the mountain target and provide an indication on the status of the conservation of mountain environments" (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). All means are the weighted mountain area in 2017 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries in 2017: Algeria, Egypt, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

**15.5**

Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species

**15.5.1**

Red List Index

For country data please refer to the annex of the present chapter

Note: According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019b), the Red List Index measures the aggregate extinction risk across groups of species and ranges from 0 to 1, where 0 stands for "all species are categorized as extinct" and 1 for "all species are categorized as least concern". No geographic aggregates can be calculated: "While global Red List Indices can be disaggregated to show trends for species at smaller spatial scales, the reverse is not true. National or regional Red List Indices cannot be aggregated to produce Red List Indices showing global trends. This is because a taxon's global extinction risk has to be evaluated at the global scale and cannot be directly determined from multiple national scale assessments across its range (although the data from such assessments can be aggregated for inclusion in the global assessment)".

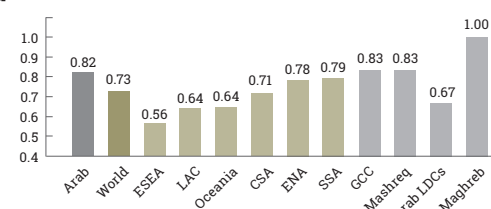
**15.6**

Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed

**15.6.1**

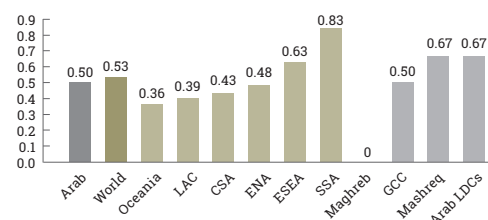
Number of countries that have adopted legislative, administrative and policy frameworks to ensure fair and equitable sharing of benefits

**Figure 11** Countries that are contracting parties to the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture



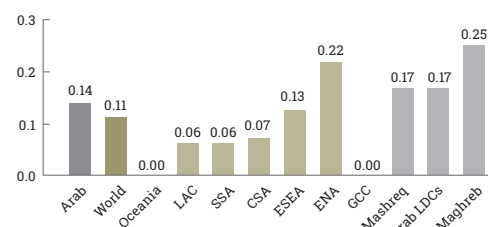
Note: 1 = yes, 0 = no. Aggregates are unweighted means and as such represent the proportion of countries. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017.

Figure 12 Countries that are parties to the Nagoya Protocol



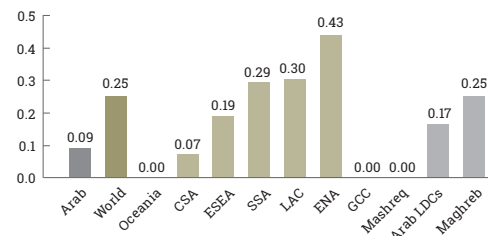
Note: 1 = yes, 0 = no. Aggregates are unweighted means and as such represent the proportion of countries. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2017.

Figure 13 Countries that have legislative, administrative and policy frameworks or measures reported through the online reporting system on compliance with the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture



Note: Aggregates are unweighted means and as such represent the proportion of countries. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2012.

Figure 14 Countries that have legislative, administrative and policy frameworks or measures reported to the Access and Benefit-Sharing Clearing-House



Note: 1 = yes, 0 = no. Aggregates are unweighted means and as such represent the proportion of countries. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for all Arab countries in 2012.

**15.7**  
Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products

**15.7.1**  
Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or illicitly trafficked

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**15.8**  
By 2020, introduce measures to prevent the introduction and significantly reduce the impact of invasive alien species on land and water ecosystems and control or eradicate the priority species

**15.8.1**  
Proportion of countries adopting relevant national legislation and adequately resourcing the prevention or control of invasive alien species

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**15.9**

By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts

**15.9.1**

Progress towards national targets established in accordance with Aichi Biodiversity Target 2 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

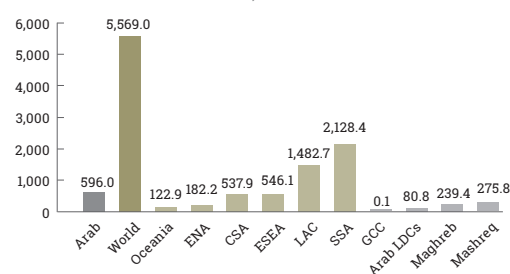
**15.a**

Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems

**15.a.1**

Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems

**Figure 15** Total official development assistance for biodiversity, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Oman (2010), Libya (2016), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2017).

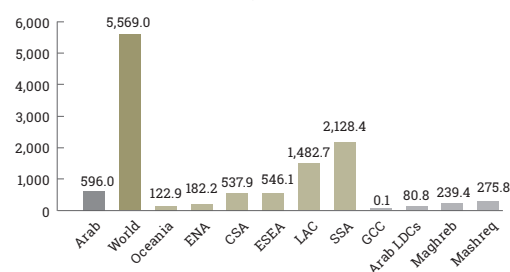
**15.b**

Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation

**15.b.1**

Official development assistance and public expenditure on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems

**Figure 16** Total official development assistance for biodiversity, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values for the following Arab countries and years: Oman (2010), Libya (2016), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2017).

**15.c**

Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities

**15.c.1**

Proportion of traded wildlife that was poached or illicitly trafficked

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) on the following indicators: 15.1.2 [Average proportion of terrestrial key biodiversity areas (KBAs) covered by protected areas (percentage)], 15.4.1 [Average proportion of mountain key biodiversity areas (KBAs) covered by protected areas (percentage)], and 15.a.1 [Total official development assistance for biodiversity, by recipient countries (millions of constant 2017 United States dollars)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. Calculated by ESCWA, see figures 2 and 3.
2. Calculated by ESCWA based on World Bank, 2015.
3. For country data, refer to the annex complementing this report.
4. See figures 11 to 14.
5. Convention on Biological Diversity, 2019.
6. Sissakian and Knutsson, 2013; Kobler, 2013. See also UNEP, WMO and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2016.
7. ESCWA, 2016.
8. ESCWA and FAO, 2017.
9. According to the methodology used in this report.
10. UNEP, WMO and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 2016.
11. UNEP, 2016.
12. Ibid.



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## SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Weak rule of law, low adherence to universal human rights treaties and conventions, and the exacerbating conditions of conflict as well as occupation are detrimental to the ability of the Arab States to achieve SDG 16. Governance deficits, including a shrinking civic space, corruption and limited political participation for a number of social groups, hinder efforts to move toward sustainable development, and increase polarization, discrimination and inequality. Genuine political will to address the root causes of these challenges and the opening of civic space are necessary to transition to just, peaceful and inclusive societies. So is the creation of effective, transparent and accountable institutions capable of supporting the achievement of all 17 SDGs.

### Key facts



Indicators related to the rule of law, regulatory quality, government effectiveness and corruption indices show regression in the region between 2010 and 2016.<sup>1</sup>



Large numbers of detainees remain unsentenced. In the 17 Arab countries where data exist for the last decade, 10 countries registered rates of unsentenced detainees over 30 per cent. In some countries, proportions have reached as high as 89 per cent and 99 per cent of detainees.<sup>7</sup>



Peaceful protests as well as violent demonstrations, mob violence and excessive police force in the face of demonstrations have markedly increased in the majority of Arab countries in recent years.<sup>2</sup>

### Access to information

Only six Arab countries have adopted relevant policies to ensure access to information: Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen.<sup>8</sup>



The Arab region is very far from ending all forms of violence against and ill-treatment of children: 82.8 per cent of children experience physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by their caregivers.<sup>3</sup>



Corruption impacts the private sector, with almost a quarter of businesses receiving at least one request for a bribe from a public official. For example, 37 per cent of businesses have experienced at least one request for a bribe from a public official in Iraq and Morocco, as have 65 per cent in Yemen.<sup>9</sup>

### Violence against women + girls

Violence against women and girls is widespread with 37 per cent of ever-partnered women reporting experiencing physical violence at some point in their lives.<sup>4</sup> Over 50 per cent of countries in the region do not criminalize violence against women.<sup>5</sup> The majority do not criminalize marital rape.<sup>6</sup>

### Intentional homicide rate

The region has an intentional homicide rate that is lower than the global average. There is significant variation among countries, however, with the highest rates in Comoros, Iraq and Mauritania.<sup>10</sup>

## Birth registration

The region overall has fared relatively well in registering the births of children under age 5. The regional average masks significant subregional variation, however, with 54 per cent of children under 5 not registered in the least developed countries.<sup>11</sup>



Protracted occupation and conflict resulted in close to 14.9 million internally displaced persons in 2017. By mid-2018, there were more than 8.7 million refugees from Arab countries registered with UNHCR, one third of whom stayed within the Arab region. In addition, the region hosted approximately 5.4 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA.<sup>12</sup>

**6.2%  
of GDP**

The Arab region has the world's highest percentage of military expenditures as a share of GDP, at around 6.2 per cent

## Battle-related deaths

The number of battle-related deaths in the region peaked in 2014 at over 97,000, almost 70 per cent of the global total. By 2017, the number had shrunk by almost half, falling to around 42,000 deaths. It declined again to less than 30,000 in 2018.<sup>13</sup>

## Arms imports

Between 2014 and 2018, the Arab region received 36 per cent of global imports of major arms, second only to Asia and Oceania. During this period, 5 of the top 10 importers of major arms were countries in the Arab region (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates).<sup>14</sup>

in 2016. The second highest figure is 2.06 per cent in North America.<sup>15</sup>

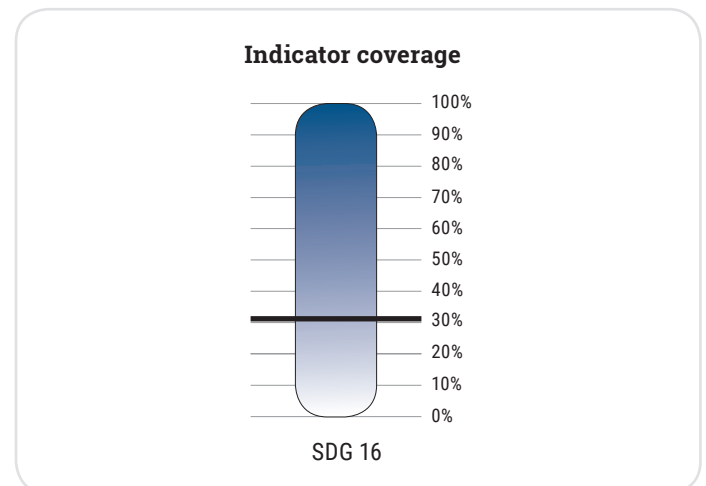
## Measuring SDG 16 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for only 7 out of 23 indicators,<sup>16</sup> covering 7 out of 12 targets under SDG 16.

SDG 16 indicators reflect the safety and security dimension of the goal at the expense of access to and quality of justice, non-discrimination, and openness and transparency. Nine of the 23 indicators relate directly to safety and security.<sup>17</sup> Corruption is measured strictly in terms of bribery in business transactions rather than issues related to procurement or use of public funds. Adherence to the rule of law, a system of checks and balances including in public finance, as well as protection from abuse and human rights violations are less well articulated in the indicators.

In the region, crucial data gaps persist for targets 16.6 and 16.7 on developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions, and on ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making; indicator 16.3.1 on access to justice mechanisms; indicator 16.5.1 on corruption in the public sector; and indicator 16.10.1 on the commitment to respect freedom and human rights. All of these targets and indicators are key to monitoring progress towards consolidating democratic governance.

The production and collection of data on SDG 16 entails a critical political challenge as SDG 16 targets and



indicators mostly revolve around the relationship between States and the people they serve. Data production and collection require trust in reporting as well as the robustness of reporting and recourse mechanisms. They also depend on independent and strong monitoring mechanisms, and the political commitment to producing comprehensive and fully disaggregated data according to sex, religion, ethnicity, disability, location, migratory status and age, among other parameters as relevant at the national level.

While the notion of inclusive and just societies is captured in target 16.7, some measure of this may also come from complementary SDG targets on the inclusion

of all in social protection systems, universal health coverage, education, participation, employment and urbanization (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 11, among others).

A human-rights-based approach to data is needed across all of the SDGs. **National human rights institutions** can play an important role in data collection, particularly related to discrimination and harassment. In the State of Palestine, the national human rights institution and the statistical office have taken encouraging steps in this direction. A signed memorandum of understanding allows for exchanges and guidance to address data challenges, especially those related to the most vulnerable and marginalized people as well as national implementation of international human rights treaties.

Source: OHCHR, 2018.

## The main barriers to achieving peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels in the region

SDG 16 comprehensively articulates the values set in the preamble and introduction to the 2030 Agenda and the transformative vision it forged. The goal recognizes the interdependency of peace, justice and sustainable development. In its emphasis on governance, it places the political dimension of sustainable development at the forefront of efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

The SDG 16 targets speak to the importance of good governance, inclusive and representative decision-making, transparent and accountable institutions, empowerment of all stakeholders, inclusive non-discriminatory societies, and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, all of which must be guaranteed to ensure peaceful societies. The goal relates to access to services and resources, use and management of natural resources, leaving no one behind, gender equality, social protection floors, decent work, and policy and agenda-setting for sustainable development in general, including through the emphasis on a broad spectrum of partners to achieve all 17 SDGs.

In the Arab region, the lack of accountable, transparent and effective institutions that guarantee equality and justice and safeguard peace jeopardizes the region's entire development agenda. When compared to other regions, the Arab region as a whole scores low on governance indicators, including the rule of law, voice and accountability, regulatory quality, political stability, government effectiveness and corruption.<sup>18</sup>

**Corruption** is prevalent across the Arab States. According to the 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index, 5 out of the 11 worst-scoring countries globally are from the region.

Corruption in both the public and private sectors threatens the transformation to sustainable development. In the absence of transparency and as the interests of the few become paramount, the possibility of devising policies that account for the different social, economic and environmental dimensions of development policies is reduced. The current situation also challenges the ability to mobilize the necessary resources for implementing the SDGs

Source: Transparency International, 2018, 2019.

The convergence of deep structural challenges, political grievances, conflict as well as occupation threatens the social fabric of the region. Corruption and weak accountability hinder a transition to inclusive and prosperous societies that combine equitable growth with sustainable management of natural resources. Deficits in human rights and democratic governance that have marred the region for decades limit the abilities of Governments to deliver on their commitments under the different SDGs and to establish sustainable peace.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING SDG 16 IN THE ARAB REGION

### Ineffective institutions and limited accountability



The majority of Arab countries continue to struggle with developing effective, accountable and transparent institutions that are open and accessible. Outdated bureaucratic structures and widespread corruption, cronyism and nepotistic dynamics plague the public sector, which hinders institutional effectiveness and erodes the environment for accountability. The barriers separating different powers are often porous and do not consistently function to full effect. This is evident when civil society calls the independence of the judiciary into question or when constitutional changes are seen to serve political decisions.

The weakness of institutions is very much linked to the weakness of accountability mechanisms. It is rare for Arab parliaments to bring ministers to account. Likewise, Arab parliaments' limited role in adopting and monitoring the implementation of public budgets reflects their weak oversight function and inability to hold the executive accountable. Low voter turnout, particularly among youth, reflects disenfranchisement and minimal trust in elections as the primary form of political participation and avenue for inducing political change. A majority of media outlets in the region are State owned or financed by political figures or factions, limiting the media's role in strengthening a culture of accountability.

### Weak rule of law



Despite some positive developments in the region, including the adoption of new constitutions and constitutional reforms as well as rights-based policies, the region still lags behind in upholding the rule of law, and in fact has regressed in recent years.<sup>19</sup> Arbitrary detention and torture have been documented by multiple national and international organizations.<sup>20</sup> Long periods of pretrial detention are common, affecting a regional average of 50 per cent of total detainees and up to 70 per cent in some countries. This also greatly contributes to rampant overcrowding in prisons.<sup>21</sup> National abilities to guarantee social justice and the protection of human rights for all are weakened by discriminatory laws, emergency laws and the absence of laws to protect individuals and groups from violence, abuse and exploitation, including detainees, children, older persons, migrant workers and women.

### Shrinking civic space



Civic space, defined as the extent to which citizens are able to practise fundamental rights of association, assembly and freedom of expression, is limited in many Arab countries. International civil society monitors currently consider civic space "closed" in nine Arab countries, "repressed" in eight, "obstructed" in four and "narrowed" in one.<sup>22</sup> In recent years, a number of countries have imposed new limitations on non-governmental organizations. These include restrictions or delays in licensing, resource mobilization, assembly and access to public spaces.<sup>23</sup> Civil society groups contend that anti-terrorism and cybercrime laws and statutes that target defamation further constrict freedom of expression and target critical voices at the national level. These findings are corroborated by observations and recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, including Universal Periodic Reviews, treaty bodies and special procedures.<sup>24</sup>

### Weak integration of human rights across social and cultural norms and practices



Upholding human rights is the responsibility of the State. As the cornerstone of inclusive and peaceful societies, however, human rights also need to be anchored in a social and cultural infrastructure of support. Violence against women and children, discrimination against migrants and domestic workers, and corporal punishment in school are all examples of widespread human rights violations. Social tolerance of these abuses often hampers efforts to institute just and inclusive mechanisms and implement associated policies to stop them. Likewise, the stigmas faced by persons with disabilities and some minority groups demonstrate that social and behavioural norms may trump more formalized attempts to enhance inclusiveness and justice. Human rights are not well integrated into school curricula or into local and national levels of governance across the region.

### Non-inclusive policymaking



Despite some developments in promoting participatory decision-making, the centralized mode of governance sustains a top-down policymaking approach in most countries. Participatory policymaking is further challenged by predominant cultural norms that promote exclusion. Women's representation in public office continues to be the lowest regional in the world; in 2018, women only held 19 per cent of seats in national parliaments.<sup>25</sup>

The exclusion of different groups from political office or decision-making impacts the nature of legislation and policy, and the extent to which it reflects the interests of different groups in society, including the poor, workers, women, youth, detainees, persons with disabilities, and ethnic and religious minorities, among others. This limits the adoption of rights-based policies and negatively impacts the ability of the State to ensure justice and guarantee equality before the law.

While a number of Arab countries have now passed access to information laws, the majority have yet to operationalize these laws in policies, or to establish mechanisms to ensure and monitor implementation.<sup>26</sup> The ability of civil society to assess the impact of development policies across different SDGs is compromised as a result.

## Protracted conflict and instability in the region



The region has experienced a number of inter-State and civil wars with devastating effects on the ability to consolidate development gains. Existing tensions are heightened by external influences and geo-political considerations that instigate proxy wars. The spillover effect in many cases has negatively impacted neighbouring countries, resulting in increased militarization and extremism. It has also amplified polarization in the region and fed conflict along ethnic or sectarian lines.

In addition to the death and displacement of millions of people across the region, conflict has resulted in extreme economic losses. On a global ranking of the economic cost of violence as a percentage of GDP in 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq were first and second, respectively, with Somalia, Libya and Yemen following closely.<sup>27</sup>

While overall arms imports have decreased in other regions (in the Americas by 36 per cent, Europe by 13 per cent, Asia and Oceania by 6.7 per cent and Africa by 6.5 per cent), in the Arab region, imports climbed by 78 per cent between 2009 to 2013 and 2014 to 2018.<sup>28</sup> Growing military and security expenditure across the region is draining public budgets of valuable resources needed for development. Conflict has had other inevitable damaging effects, including an increase in human trafficking as well as illicit financial and arms flows.

Provision of and access to public services have been greatly compromised. School enrolment in conflict-affected countries is dropping, and educational institutions are widely perceived as ineffective. Some 18.4 million school-aged children in 2017 required assistance to continue their education in seven crisis countries (Iraq, Libya, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen).<sup>29</sup> The resurgence of massive epidemics, such as cholera, has been documented as well as an increase in hunger in conflict and non-conflict countries alike.

## The persistence of Israeli occupation



The Arab region has the longest occupation in modern history. The Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine has resulted in significant challenges to development, extensive human rights abuses and the loss of thousands of lives. A number of policies, practices and measures implemented by Israel violate international law, including the annexation of land and settlement building. They also limit the capacity of Palestinian institutions to provide adequate and quality services to the population.

Palestinian civilians endure excessive and often disproportionate use of force by the Israeli military and security forces. Between 2014 and 2019, for example, 14,466 Palestinian children were injured and 720 were killed as a result of direct conflict.<sup>30</sup> Detainees, including children, are subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, particularly during arrest and interrogation. Home demolitions and forced evictions create a coercive environment in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and this amounts to forcible displacement as Palestinians have no choice but to leave. Between 2009 and 2018, approximately 9,000 Palestinians (including 4,697 children) were displaced because of home demolitions.<sup>31</sup> Land grabs, annexation and limits on Palestinians' ability to build homes and structures, as well as limits on their mobility, routinely violate the most basic human rights of the Palestinian people.

The Arab region remains the most dangerous for **journalists**, with 191 killed between 2012 and 2016, representing 36 per cent of all global deaths of journalists during that period.

In parts of the Arab region, heightened threats from violent extremist groups and conflicts have been used to rationalize an increase in large-scale arrests and detentions, forced closures of media houses and dismissals of critical journalists, raids on journalists' unions and expulsions of foreign journalists.

Source: UNESCO, 2016.

The adoption of **open government** can support Arab countries to enhance transparency, accountability and the engagement of citizens in government decision-making and the delivery of citizen-centric services. An open government is defined by its effectiveness and efficiency in dispensing its duties. Its activities are transparent, and it is responsive to its citizens' needs. Such a government values citizen participation, experience and knowledge when making decisions. An open government is also an inclusive government whose services are accessible to all citizens.

Source: ESCWA, 2018a.

The alarmingly high prevalence of **violence against children** in Arab and neighbouring countries has been confirmed by a number of national surveys. For the overall child population (aged 2–14 years) of 85 million covered by these surveys, an estimated 71 million children (84 per cent) have experienced any type of violent discipline in the 30 days prior to the survey, 68 million (80 per cent) psychological aggression, 60 million (70 per cent) physical punishment and roughly 27 million (31 per cent) severe physical punishment. The analysis highlights a positive association between the high prevalence of violent practices used in child discipline, and the widespread acceptance and justification of domestic violence in the region.

Source: UNICEF, 2019.

Recent years have seen a surge in political instability at the national level. **Protests** have broken out in many countries, some sustained over time. Protesters often cite inequality, social injustice, non-democratic forms of governance, corruption, the prevalence of poverty and unemployment as key concerns.

By mid-2018, 5,781 **Palestinians** (including 270 children and 65 women) were **detained** in Israeli prisons. Among them, 456 were administrative detainees being held without charge or trial.

Source: ADDAMEER, 2018.

## At risk of being left behind

Given the transboundary nature of peace and governance issues, failure to achieve SDG 16 puts the **region as a whole** at risk of being left behind in the global march towards sustainable development. The absence of peace and the weakness of representative State institutions impact everyone, while amplifying existing vulnerabilities.

The inability of the State to guarantee the rule of law and access to justice for all, everywhere and all the time, increases the vulnerability of all individuals. **Individuals and groups subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or status**, however, are subject to additional or intersecting constraints on their political, social and economic participation. They are particularly vulnerable. They include the poor, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, stateless people or refugees, and migrant workers, among others. Their vulnerability is difficult to capture in the absence of fully disaggregated data and full civil registration.

Throughout the region, **women** lack full citizenship and face bigger challenges in accessing justice. This pertains in particular to justice in matters related to nationality, divorce and custody of children and land rights as well as gender-based violence and restrictions on mobility.<sup>32</sup> Even in cases where laws exist to protect women, they may not be enforced, including because mechanisms are not in place to ensure enforcement. These injustices marginalize women in social, economic and political life and place the region woefully behind on SDG 16.

The **Palestinian people** continue to face economic hardships, insecurity, violence and death as a result of the Israeli occupation. Occupation threatens all facets of life and all dimensions of development. Unless sustainable peace and justice are achieved for the Palestinian people, they are at extreme risk of being left behind.<sup>33</sup>

**Children who experience conflict** face an entire lifetime of coping with the trauma and may never be able to catch up to their peers. Children who lose one or both parents, are left out of school and are not registered will continuously struggle to overcome limitations imposed on them so early on.

Unregistered children are a serious concern. For example, 83 per cent of Syrian refugees under age 5 in Lebanon were not registered in 2017. The region must now also reckon with the reality of children born under the rule of so called ISIS and issued ISIS certificates. In addition to their uncertain status, these children may have been exposed to levels of violence and brutality that will require special and long-term integrated care.

Source: UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, 2017.

## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 16

### 1. Intensify efforts to build effective, accountable and transparent institutions:

- Strengthen the separation of powers, especially between the judiciary, and the legislative and executive branches.
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight, including through the timely review and approval of budgets,
- and ensure the adequate allocation of resources and access to information so parliaments can act effectively.
- Introduce regulations to curb corruption and nepotism, and enhance meritocracy in public institutions and public works.

- Develop internal and external auditing and oversight mechanisms, and strengthen the role of supreme audit institutions and economic and social councils.
- Use technology to enhance open government, adopt more effective participatory approaches in governance, curb corruption and assess the impact of policies.

## **2. Uphold the rule of law, fight corruption and promote civil liberties:**

- Adopt concrete anti-corruption strategies and introduce robust systems of checks and balances.
- Guarantee that judicial and legislative institutions function independently.
- Repeal discriminatory laws and introduce anti-discrimination legislation to ensure equal rights for all before the law, regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability status, migratory status or other characteristics.
- Introduce or enforce existing laws against all forms of violence, including domestic violence, violence in the workplace, violence against children, violence against domestic workers, and violence in prisons and places of detention.
- Adopt and/or operationalize access to information laws through effective and monitored policies.
- Reform security apparatuses to enhance transparency and respect for human rights, and adherence to constitutional guarantees of rights and freedoms, with attendant oversight mechanisms.
- Ensure a human-rights-based approach to data collection generally, improve data collection for all SDG 16 indicators, and enhance the systematic identification of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

## **3. Expand civic space and encourage a vibrant civic culture and engaged civil society organizations. These groups should have the capacity to serve as partners in achieving the 2030 Agenda and to hold the State accountable for progress:**

- Lift limitations on the work of civil society, including on licensing, assembly and resource mobilization.

- Introduce constitutional safeguards or other mechanisms necessary to protect the right to freedom of expression and association across civil society, including media and academia.

## **4. Support all efforts to advance human rights as social values:**

- Integrate international human rights into educational curricula at all levels and across all school systems in the region.
- Raise awareness on the implementation of recommendations emanating from human rights mechanisms of the United Nations, including the Universal Periodic Review, as critical to the implementation of SDG 16.
- Facilitate the work of grass-roots and independent human rights institutions, including at local levels.
- Encourage the equal participation of all social groups, including women, youth and minorities, in decision-making at local and national levels.

## **5. Increase efforts to de-escalate conflict and address its root causes:**

- Enhance regional dialogue and cooperation to achieve SDG 16, given the transboundary nature of conflict and the similarities of structural impediments, including weak rule of law, ineffective institutions and limited accountability, among other challenges fuelling social discontent.

## **6. Ensure the full realization of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees:**

- Ensure sustainable peace, end the occupation that threatens the well-being of people living under it and ensure full adherence to international law.



# SDG 16 targets and indicators in the Arab region

## Target

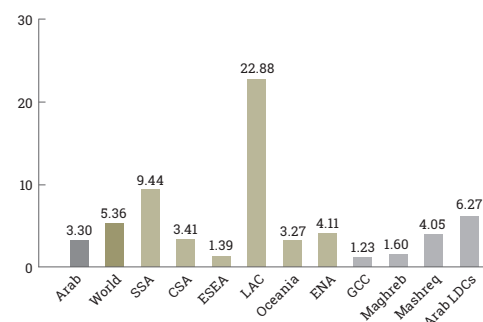
**16.1**  
Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere

## Indicator

**16.1.1**  
Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population, by sex and age

## Data

Figure 1 Number of victims of intentional homicide per 100,000 population



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2010), Egypt, Kuwait and Tunisia (2012), Yemen (2013), Bahrain, Iraq, Oman and Qatar (2014), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and United Arab Emirates (2015), Jordan, Lebanon and State of Palestine (2016). According to the United Nations Statistics Division (2019), this indicator "does not include killings directly related to war/conflict and other killings that amount to war crimes".

**16.1.2**  
Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population, by sex, age and cause

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.1.3**  
Proportion of population subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence in the previous 12 months

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

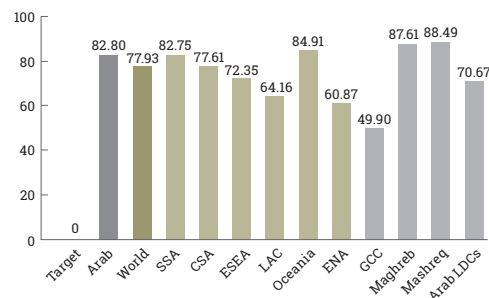
**16.1.4**  
Proportion of population that feel safe walking alone around the area they live

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.2**  
End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children

**16.2.1**  
Proportion of children aged 1–17 years who experienced any physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the past month

Figure 2 Proportion of children aged 1–14 years who experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the last month (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the population of children aged 1 to 14, using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Lebanon (2009), Iraq (2011), Jordan, Qatar and Tunisia (2012), Algeria and Yemen (2013), Egypt, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014) and Mauritania (2015).

**16.2.2**  
Number of victims of human trafficking per 100,000 population, by sex, age and form of exploitation

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.2.3**  
Proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.3**  
Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all

**16.3.1**  
Proportion of victims of violence in the previous 12 months who reported their victimization to competent authorities or other officially recognized conflict resolution mechanisms

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.3.2**  
Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of overall prison population

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.4**  
By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime

**16.4.1**  
Total value of inward and outward illicit financial flows (in current United States dollars)

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.4.2**  
Proportion of seized, found or surrendered arms whose illicit origin or context has been traced or established by a competent authority in line with international instruments

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.5**

Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

**16.5.1**

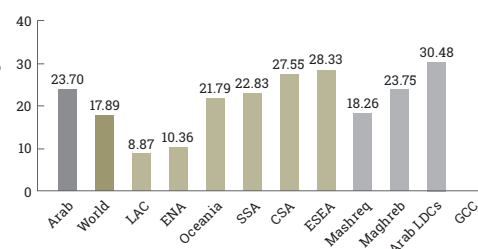
Proportion of persons who had at least one contact with a public official and who paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials, during the previous 12 months

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.5.2**

Proportion of businesses that had at least one contact with a public official and that paid a bribe to a public official, or were asked for a bribe by those public officials during the previous 12 months

Figure 3 Bribery incidence/proportion of firms experiencing at least one request for a bribe (percentage)



Note: Global, regional and subregional aggregates are the simple means of the country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Iraq (2011), Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, State of Palestine, Tunisia and Yemen (2013), Mauritania and Sudan (2014) and Egypt (2016).

**16.6**

Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

**16.6.1**

Primary government expenditures as a proportion of original approved budget, by sector (or by budget codes or similar)

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.6.2**

Proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.7**

Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

**16.7.1**

Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.7.2**

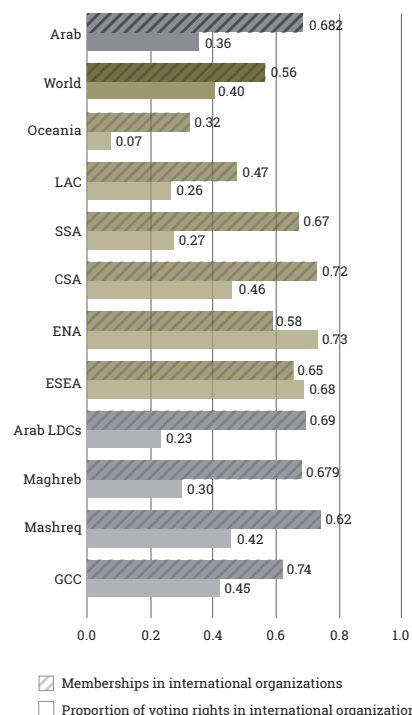
Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.8**  
Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance

**16.8.1**  
Proportion of members and voting rights of developing countries in international organizations

**Figure 4** Membership in international organizations and the proportion of voting rights in international organizations (percentage)

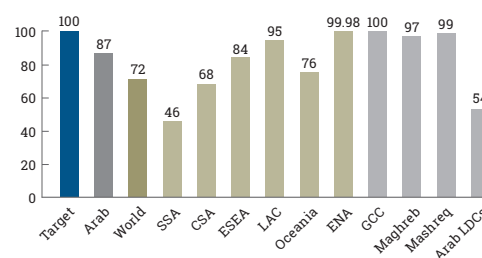


Note: We visualize and analyse these two subindicators of indicator 16.8.1 separately since they are at a different scale and unit, and they represent different concepts substantively. The index of the first subindicator is the simple arithmetic mean of seven dummy variables, one for each international organization, which take a value of 1 if the country is a member and a 0 if not. The index of the second subindicator is the simple arithmetic mean of seven variables depicting the voting power of countries in each of the seven international organizations, as calculated/ reported by the data sources and explained in the Annex. Global, regional and subregional aggregates of each of the two created indices are the simple means of the country values, thus representing the average membership share in international organizations per region and the average voting rights, respectively. The calculated Arab regional aggregates of the two indices include the data values of all Arab countries in 2017.

**16.9**  
By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

**16.9.1**  
Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age

**Figure 5** Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by the population of children aged 0 to 4 (i.e., under 5 years) using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following Arab countries and years: Lebanon (2009), Iraq and Morocco (2011), Comoros, Jordan, United Arab Emirates and Tunisia (2012), Algeria and Yemen (2013), Egypt, State of Palestine and Sudan (2014), Mauritania and Qatar (2015).

**16.10**

Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

**16.10.1**

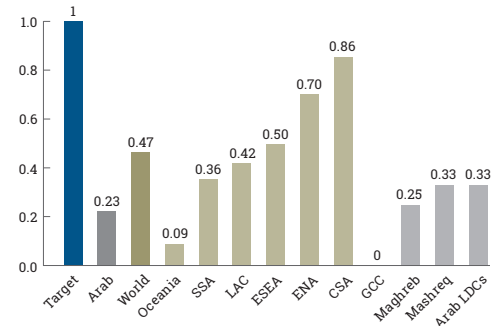
Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**16.10.2**

Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information

Figure 6 Countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information



Note: Global, regional and subregional aggregates are the simple means of the country values, representing the share of complying countries in the world or in a certain region or subregion. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2018.

**16.a**

Strengthen relevant national institutions, including through international cooperation, for building capacity at all levels, in particular in developing countries, to prevent violence and combat terrorism and crime

**16.a.1**

Existence of independent national human rights institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles

Figure 7 Countries with independent national human rights institutions in compliance (fully or partially) with the Paris Principles



Note: We created one 0 to 1 dummy variable out of the two preserved series of this indicator (please see the Annex for more information). Global, regional and subregional aggregates of the created dummy variable are the simple means of the country values, as this is a State level indicator. The aggregates thus represent the share of complying countries in the world or in a certain region or subregion. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 Arab countries in 2017.

**16.b**

Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development

**16.b.1**

Proportion of population reporting having personally felt discriminated against or harassed in the previous 12 months on the basis of a ground of discrimination prohibited under international human rights law

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA); Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA); Europe and Northern America (ENA); Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC); Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs); Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018).

## ENDNOTES

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1. ESCWA analysis based on calculations of data from World Bank, 2018.
2. Analysis by ESCWA based on data from ACLED, 2019.
3. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
4. WHO, 2013.
5. UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States and North Africa, 2018.
6. ESCWA, 2017.
7. Based on data from UNODC, 2017.
8. For further details, please refer to country profile graphs complementing this report.
9. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 3.
10. Ibid., figure 1.
11. Ibid., figure 4.
12. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2018; UNHCR, 2018; UNRWA, 2018.
13. The State of Palestine is not included in the calculation. ESCWA calculations based on the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset available at <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#battlerelated>. Pettersson, Therese, Stina Högladh, and Magnus Öberg, 2019.
14. Wezeman and others, 2019 and ESCWA calculations based on SIPRI, 2019.
15. ESCWA calculations based on GDP data of the World Bank and SIPRI, 2018.
16. According to the methodology used in this report.
17. Praia City Group on Governance Statistics, 2019.
18. ESCWA analysis based on calculations using data from World Bank, 2018.
19. Ibid. See also Amnesty International, 2018.
20. See, for example, Amnesty International, 2018; OHCHR, 2017.
21. UNODC and the League of Arab States, 2016.
22. CIVICUS, 2019.
23. ANND, 2018.
24. OHCHR, 2019.
25. Based on data from Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019. The regional country grouping per the Inter-Parliamentary Union definition is available at <http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/new-groups.pdf>.
26. Shuqeir, 2018.
27. Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019.
28. Wezeman and others, 2019 and ESCWA calculations based on SIPRI, 2019.
29. Calculated by ESCWA based on OCHA, 2018b.
30. Calculated by ESCWA based on OCHA, 2018a .
31. Calculated by ESCWA based on OCHA, 2018c.
32. ESCWA, 2017.
33. ESCWA, 2018b.

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## SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

SDG 17 encapsulates the interdependence, complementarity, and shared and differentiated responsibilities of all countries to support transformative change. Means of implementing the 2030 Agenda are not determined by national conditions alone. SDG 17 targets capture the broader focus of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. They implicate global frameworks and dynamics that structure the flow and management of resources, whether financial, economic or natural; that determine the mobility of people; and that define the exchange and transfer of knowledge and capacities.

In addition to the pressing challenges facing Arab countries in securing means of implementation at the national level, global economic structures remain unsupportive. They drive inequality between and among countries and regions, while international aid and transfer of knowledge and expertise remain far below expectation and need. Regional entry points are also crucial. They can facilitate or stunt the ability of countries to mobilize political will, expertise and resources to tackle transboundary priorities, which are stark in the Arab region, including those related to water, food security, climate change and peace. Arab countries have yet to consolidate the political will to enhance regional integration across different dimensions of sustainable development and realize its potential to advance the 2030 Agenda.

### Key facts

#### Tax revenue to GDP

Ratios of tax revenue to GDP vary between oil-rich and oil-poor countries in the Arab region. For example, the ratio stood at 2.95 per cent and 4.86 per cent in Iraq and Qatar, respectively, in 2017, compared to 21.82 per cent and 21.92 per cent in Morocco and Tunisia, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

**\$1 in  
=  
\$1.5 out**

Between 2011 and 2016, for every \$1 of debt inflows received, the region paid back \$1.5 in arrears on outstanding debt stocks.<sup>2</sup>

#### Illicit financial flows

Since 2013, illicit financial flows in the Arab region have outstripped the combined growth of ODA and foreign direct investment (FDI).<sup>3</sup>

**25%**

Of the total ODA received by Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen in 2018, 25 per cent was provided by Arab donors (Kuwait and United Arab Emirates).<sup>4</sup>

#### \$59.7 billion in remittances

The region received around \$59.7 billion in remittances in 2019, representing 8.45 per cent of global remittances.<sup>5</sup> On average, high-cost corridors involving large transfer fees and similar features deprived the region of an estimated \$1.7 billion in annual development finance between 2011 and 2016.<sup>6</sup>

**FDI**

The region is a net exporter of both capital and primary income. For every \$1 in FDI the region generated, a corresponding \$1.80 left in outflows and primary income on FDI.<sup>7</sup>



## 0.64% of GDP to R&D

The region is home to only 2 per cent of the researchers in the world. It allocates 0.64 per cent of GDP expenditure to R&D, less than half the global average.<sup>8</sup>



The major oil-exporting countries (Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) have the largest share of the region's external trade, with exports accounting for over 88 per cent of total exports.<sup>17</sup>

## GII

None of the Arab countries are in the top 20 on the Global Innovation Index.<sup>9</sup>



Internet use ranges from 21.84 per cent of the population in the least developed countries to 78.35 per cent in the GCC countries.<sup>10</sup>



The share of women using the Internet is still lower than that of men in most Arab countries, with the GCC countries having a much lower gap than others.<sup>11</sup> The most recent data point to an increase in the gender gap in the region overall, from 17.4 per cent in 2013 to 24.4 per cent in 2019.<sup>12</sup>

## Internet Use

The highest use of the Internet is for social media applications followed by news and job searches.<sup>13</sup>

## ICT 0.6% to 6.0%

The ICT sector's contribution to GDP is still weak, varying between 0.6 per cent and 6 per cent during 2016–2018.<sup>14</sup> The sector is concentrated in telecommunications. There is minimal export of technology-related products.<sup>15</sup>

## Total Trade to GDP

The trade openness of Arab countries, indicating dependence on the global economy, and measured by the ratio of total trade to GDP in 2016, varies across the region, from 151 in the United Arab Emirates to 78 in Tunisia, 50.6 in Saudi Arabia, 26.1 in Egypt and 24.5 in Yemen.<sup>16</sup>

## Intra-Arab Trade

The share of intra-Arab trade in goods was around 13 per cent in 2017,<sup>18</sup> but remains well below the share of intraregional trade in the European Union (64 per cent) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (24 per cent).<sup>19</sup>

## 27%

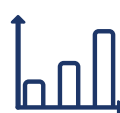
Around 70 per cent of exports from the Arab region are petroleum products mostly directed towards other regions. When excluding petroleum exports, the intra-regional trade ratio increases to 27 per cent, but is still far lower than that of other regions.<sup>20</sup>

## Public-private partnerships (PPP)

The majority of public-private partnerships in the region are in the GCC countries, and they are concentrated in water and energy. In the region as a whole, public-private partnerships are largely in energy and telecommunications.<sup>21</sup>

## 9 countries

Nine Arab countries currently have laws on public-private partnerships: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.<sup>22</sup>



Despite national variations in SDG data availability, regionally, data are available for less than half of the global SDG indicators, with the vast majority of indicators lacking disaggregated data.

## SDG Indicator Coverage

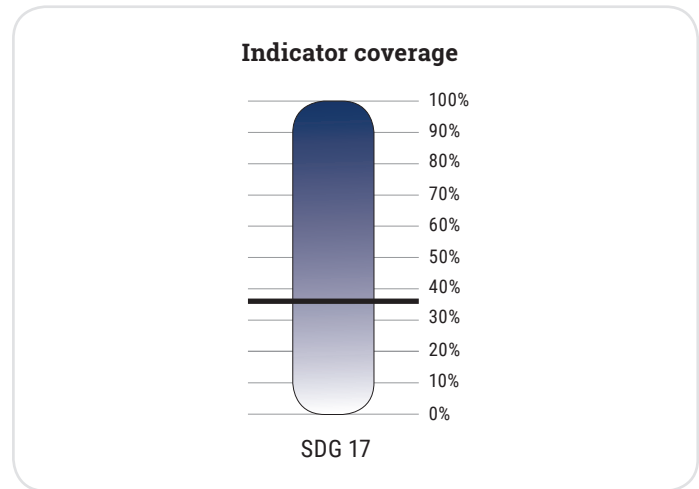
Across the region, data availability is particularly weak on indicators measuring the environmental dimension of sustainable development, including for SDGs 12 and 13.

## Measuring SDG 17 in the Arab region according to the global SDG indicator framework

Data are available for 9 out of 25 indicators, covering 7 out of 19 targets under SDG 17.

Available data mostly relate to the indicators of targets on data, monitoring and accountability, as well as those related to trade. Data are largely unavailable for targets on multistakeholder partnerships, some aspects of financing and policy coherence. A number of indicators do not capture the complexity of the target, including capacity-building, which is measured in dollar value. The majority of indicators are input rather than output indicators.

The 19 targets of SDG 17 cannot entirely capture all elements of the means of implementation. A full picture requires the so-called alphabetical targets across the 16 other SDGs. Those include indicators on mobilizing resources, policy coherence, financing, capacity-building, technology transfer, and engaging different stakeholders, including local actors and women. In addition, those means of implementation targets often relate to intersecting levels of input and output between national



(as well as local), regional and global levels. Therefore, measuring SDG 17 can only be indicative if it addresses these levels of intersection and it remains partial without attention to their dimensions across the 16 other SDGs.

### SDG 17 CONTAINS TWO TARGETS TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2020

**TARGET 17.11** - Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports

**TARGET 17.18** - Enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity,

migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

### SDG 17 ALSO INCLUDES A TARGET TO BE ACHIEVED BY 2017

**TARGET 17.8** - Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology

## The main barriers to strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development in the region

### Finance

With one decade remaining to implement the 2030 Agenda, the Arab region continues to face a large financing gap, estimated to be in the trillions of dollars. The potential to mobilize resources across funding sources (public, private, blended, multilateral, etc.)

remains stunted and far below need. These challenges take place against a global backdrop of increased inequality and unmet ODA commitments, threatening the region's ability to move forward on all 17 SDGs.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO FINANCE AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ARAB REGION

### Fiscal policy



Inefficiency in public spending as well as ineffective or inequitable use of taxation limit domestic resource mobilization. Gaps persist despite attempts in some countries to broaden the tax base and remove some tax exemptions and inefficient fossil-fuel subsidies, among other measures. Oil-rich countries continue to rely on oil revenues with all the attendant volatility this entails. In those countries, taxes as a share of government revenue remain negligible. Where taxation has increased, it remains linked to hydrocarbon industries.<sup>23</sup>

Oil-poor and middle-income countries depend on tax revenue but their tax-to-GDP ratios are low, and they are generally burdened with heavy debt-servicing. Taxation is often indirect and regressive rather than direct and progressive, with the largest impact borne by households in middle- and lower-income brackets. In many Arab countries, the top-tier tax rates have not changed in the last decade.<sup>24</sup> All these issues together increase inequality among groups at different income levels. Where taxation has shifted towards more progressive models, compliance and enforcement remain weak overall.

### Structure of the economy and low investments



Arab economies are largely characterized by non-productive sectors that do not generate adequate opportunities for decent employment. Industry and manufacturing and intraregional trade are weak, while the bulk of economic activity occurs in the financial sector and real estate. Efforts to diversify economies are not sufficient; the informal sector is large and unintegrated. This impacts the quantity as well as the quality of foreign direct investment.

Long-term, responsible and development-oriented private finance in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, both domestic and foreign, lacks the nurturing competitive investment climate and cross-border arrangements that facilitate the movement of capital and people in the region. Risk factors loom large, further hampering efforts to channel sustainable private finance to SDG achievement. Intra-regional remittances and FDI flows, especially from oil-rich Arab economies, provide some support. Overall, however, the investment climate remains unstable and risky, riddled with corruption and burdened with outdated regulations and red tape.

### Illicit financial flows



Curbing illicit financial flows is critical to the ability to mobilize resources, implement the 2030 Agenda and enhance governance. The region's average illicit financial flows through trade misinvoicing in non-oil sectors averaged 8.2 per cent of total non-oil trade in the world, the equivalent of \$60.3 billion a year between 2008 and 2015.<sup>25</sup> Illicit flows from drug trafficking, illicit arms trading and undeclared oil trading also contribute to the erosion of the regulatory environment, and undercut effective mobilization and use of resources.<sup>26</sup>

### Debt servicing



The region's percentage of debt servicing to exports of goods and services is more than double the world average of 4.62 per cent, with the Mashreq reaching 17.52 per cent.<sup>27</sup> Since concessional debt has been on the decline in middle-income countries, interest rates are increasing, further enlarging debt burdens.<sup>28</sup> Debt servicing is syphoning off vitally needed resources, curtailing fiscal space and threatening sustainable development. While globally net debt inflows to low- and middle-income countries fell considerably in 2018, Arab countries recorded the fastest accumulation in external debt stock, on average 6 per cent, propelled by Egypt, which posted a 17 per cent increase between 2017 and 2018.<sup>29</sup> Lebanon stands out with an estimated gross government debt-to-GDP ratio of 155 per cent in 2019.<sup>30</sup>

### Unmet ODA commitments



Few developed countries have delivered on their commitment to provide the equivalent of 0.7 per cent of GNI in development aid. Arab countries, like other developing nations, bear the cost. The nature and quality of ODA has changed significantly in recent years, with funds not channelled proportionately to critical human development priorities, including health and education. A substantial proportion of ODA remains tied, with benefits accruing to developed and donor countries.

### Conflict



Conflict has reversed development gains, severely damaged industries and productive capacities, and destroyed vital infrastructure as well as entire cities in some cases. It has diverted domestic resources and foreign aid towards humanitarian relief and already bloated military expenditure. The cost of rebuilding infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, now comes on top of already chronic funding gaps for development needs. Estimates of the economic cost of conflict vary. By one calculation, the cost was \$752 billion between 2011 and 2015, covering direct costs incurred by Iraq, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, and the indirect spill-over effects on neighbouring countries.<sup>31</sup> The diversion of a proportion of humanitarian aid to in-donor refugee services<sup>32</sup> shrinks its potential to support productive investments and necessary infrastructure.

In urging a stronger response to climate change, the **Paris Agreement** calls for “a balance between adaptation and mitigation” based on national priorities. While Arab States are committed to addressing both, they have clearly identified adaptation as a national and regional priority. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change data for 2016, however, show that developed country bilateral support to the Arab States for mitigation exceeds finance for adaptation by a factor of 5 to 1; loans also exceed grants by 5 to 1. The Arab least developed countries have received just 2 per cent of bilateral climate finance flows to the region.

Source: ESCWA, 2019b.

## Technology

Technology’s potential in Arab countries is immense. It can empower individuals and communities, decrease inequality and contribute solutions for development challenges across the 17 SDGs in areas such as climate change, public health, water and sanitation, sustainable use of energy, good governance, poverty reduction and education, among others. It can also create new job opportunities, enhance job conditions and improve the competitiveness of the private sector. This is particularly so for a region with a high concentration of young people and the potential to absorb technology and engage with its possibilities. There are some attempts to grasp technology’s potential for economic and social change, especially in middle-income countries. These efforts have been limited, however. The region remains a consumer rather than a producer of technology, with weak links between science, technology and innovation, and the market.

**Technology transfer** into the region is weak. While more efforts by developed countries and multinational corporations are needed, the region has to improve its capacity to absorb technology transfer, both in terms of human capacities (educational systems, research infrastructure, innovation ecosystems, etc.) as well as logistical frameworks.

Few studies assess the preparedness of Arab countries to receive technology transfer. A recent study focused on the GCC countries concluded that readiness for technology transfer is hampered by lack of industrial management expertise, weak technical skills among the local population, and bureaucratic and cumbersome legal codes.

Source: S. Elmuti and S. Abou-Zaid, 2013.

### THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO TECHNOLOGY AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ARAB REGION

#### Weak absorptive capacity

The prioritization of and investment in human capabilities is weak compared to other regions. Educational systems as well as political structures and social norms do not emphasize critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving. This has prevented the emergence of a critical mass of people effectively using, innovating and producing technology, in contrast to East or South Asia. Some middle-income countries, such as Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, have notable initiatives, but most efforts remain limited. Many lack critical funds.

Weak absorptive capacity has resulted in a consumerist approach where people use technologies and products, but do not produce or tailor these based on local needs. With some exceptions, most technologies are developed elsewhere. Weak absorption limits investment in technological production and industry, and is exacerbated by limited regional cooperation, which has undercut prospects to broaden markets and make production more viable. The majority of private-sector activity in technology, whether by domestic or multinational firms, is concentrated in sales and marketing, and in some countries, the development of software that partially satisfies local needs.<sup>33</sup>



#### Technological infrastructure and regulatory arrangements

A number of countries, especially the least developed countries and those suffering the impact of conflict and occupation, lack resources to provide the necessary infrastructure for Internet and connectivity services. In many middle-income countries, while physical infrastructure is in place, access to technology and services might be uneven, driven in part by the weakness of legal and regulatory frameworks that would ensure inclusive coverage of different areas or communities. Urban-rural disparities are evident. In Egypt in 2016, the Internet reached 51.1 per cent of individuals in urban areas compared to 33.5 per cent in rural areas. The same year, in Morocco, the rates were 66.9 per cent and 44.4 per cent, respectively, and in Oman, 72.6 per cent and 61.3 per cent, respectively.<sup>34</sup>



### Lack of an enabling environment for science, technology and innovation, and technology transfer



A strong science, technology and innovation ecosystem is an important prerequisite for producing, transferring and adapting technology. The Arab region is home to 2 per cent of the researchers in the world and allocates 0.64 per cent of GDP expenditure to R&D, less than half the global average.<sup>35</sup> Some recent national development plans/visions for 2030 or similar exercises—for example, in Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia—have included pillars for science, technology and innovation. Yet implementation, planning and funding remain unclear or missing.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, countries lack clear direction for engaging the private sector, academia and research centres, and local communities to promote cooperation and effective partnership in the transfer and adaptation of technology. Incentives to engage researchers and academics in industry are extremely limited. In the few attempts at technology transfer, attention to social and environmental problems has been limited or even absent.

### Few incentives for entrepreneurship and small business



National or regional funds to support emerging, innovative ideas and small businesses are insufficient in the region. Efforts to incubate new initiatives or provide support—both in terms of logistics and knowledge—remain limited. Often, these deficits prompt the migration of youth and promising talent away from the region.

The business environment is generally marked by cumbersome, outdated or costly regulations that make it harder for young people, women and small businesses to access credit, markets and know-how. The cost of registering a new business or closing an existing one is often prohibitive, and might work to expand the informal economy. Seventeen Arab countries rank sixtieth or below on a global index of a conducive business environment (out of 187 countries, with the most conducive being first), while five countries – Iraq, Libya, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen – are among the most difficult countries globally for doing business.<sup>37</sup>

### Capacity-building: large gaps and little evidence of delivery

Capacity-building is greatly needed to overhaul approaches to development planning and implementation to achieve the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region. Different SDGs call for capacity-building support to equip countries with the right knowledge, technologies and skills. At least nine targets across SDGs 1 to 16 call specifically for capacity-building. Many indicate support by developed countries, such as by sharing scientific knowledge and technological know-how (target 14.a), building infrastructure (target 11.c) or direct training (target 3.c). Capacity-building therefore cannot be considered a target solely under SDG 17.

An assessment of capacity-building support as the dollar value of financial and technical assistance committed to developing countries reveals that the region received a total of \$3.97 billion in 2016, or about 15 per cent of such assistance globally.\* Arab least developed countries received less than all other subregions, however. Egypt and Jordan received the most, indicating a possible lack of correlation to need.

Across the 16 other SDGs, capacity-building gaps loom large. Limited capacity in fact emerges as a barrier to achieving a number of the goals, particularly those more directly linked to the environmental dimension of sustainable development—natural resource management, risk assessment, and mitigation and adaptation measures (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 and 15). The persistence of these gaps indicates that support lags far behind need and demand as well as the global commitment to enable developing countries to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

\* Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 5.

## Trade

The region is not well-integrated into global value chains, and intraregional trade is low. Anaemic trade infrastructure (both logistical and physical) and uneven connectivity between and within countries impact the implementation of other goals. The least developed as well as other countries continue to suffer the impact of unequal access

to and representation in global economic governance institutions, which hampers the role of trade in addressing global inequalities, strengthening economic performance, and bridging knowledge and resource gaps between societies to achieve the SDGs.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO TRADE AS A MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ARAB REGION

### The structure of Arab economies

Overdependence on oil in some countries, the concentration of low-productivity sectors and limited manufacturing, and a weak agricultural sector challenge the region's participation and competitiveness in global trade. Integration into global value chains has not seen a significant improvement in the last 20 years.<sup>38</sup>



### Weak political will to improve and operationalize the Pan Arab Free Trade Agreement and related instruments

As the primary framework to organize trade among Arab countries, the Pan Arab Free Trade Agreement remains focused on trade in goods. It does not facilitate the necessary mobility of people, services and investment. The agreement also remains vulnerable to political dynamics in the region, impacting the consistency and sustainability of intraregional trade.<sup>39</sup>



### Fragmented and not forward-looking trade negotiations

Trade negotiations with other regions or economic entities are not coordinated and not optimally used to trigger growth in productivity and services at the national level; agreements are rarely rooted in a vision of what could be produced and traded, reducing the potential of trade agreements to mobilize resources, capacities and support.<sup>40</sup> Arab countries need to strengthen their negotiating position as a bloc, similar to African or Asian countries.



### Developed countries' limited efforts to enhance the trading position of developing countries

Commitments to provide higher market access to goods and services originating in developing countries, and revise enforced trade agreements to increase access and lower tariffs remain either unfulfilled or at a scale that is too small to improve the trading possibilities for Arab countries. This is particularly detrimental for the least developed countries, where prospects for economic growth largely hinge on differential trade treatment, regionally and globally.



## Systemic issues

### Multistakeholder Partnerships: Fragmented attempts, a shrinking civic space, and limited partnerships for the public good

The engagement of civil society in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its follow-up and review processes remains uneven, falling short of its potential. An enabling environment is largely absent. Engagement has mostly centred on consultations for preparing the Voluntary National Reviews presented to the High-level Political Forum mandated to review SDG implementation. Consultations have yet to generate more systematic engagement of civil society at subnational and local levels, even though this is critical to achieving the SDGs. Multiple goals call for collaborating with beneficiaries and local actors; they also prioritize the accountability of the State to its people. Shrinking civic space in the region has been documented in the majority of countries in recent years; legislative limitations on the work of civil society and access to information are major challenges (SDG 16).

Public-private partnerships in the region are concentrated in sectors that are profitable for multinationals and other private sector companies, including energy, electricity, telecommunications and transport. Such partnerships rarely target so-called social sectors or those that invest in human capabilities or social innovation. While laws exist to structure these partnerships in some Arab countries, more work is needed to ensure they are scrutinized for alignment with human rights and the principles of inclusivity and equity.\*

\*Alsaidi, forthcoming.

### Policy and institutional coherence

Efforts to enhance policy and institutional coherence are a global, regional and national challenge. Globally, the meaningful alignment of different frameworks, including those related to economic governance and performance, climate change, financing for development, support to the least developed countries and international human rights, to name a few, have yet to materialize. Across the SDGs, regional integration in areas as varied as trade, natural resources governance, migration, climate change and transport needs to be enhanced for individual Arab countries to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

At the national level, the majority of Arab countries have established intersectoral committees to coordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, often at the ministerial level and headed by the office of the Prime Minister or equivalent. The inclusivity of those committees and the weight given to the different dimensions of sustainable development vary from one country to the next.

The extent to which such committees are spurring intersectoral work is not yet clear. Weak coherence between sectoral strategies aimed at achieving specific SDGs or national priorities remains a major handicap, despite the urgent need to integrate or reformulate strategies to address interlinkages and trade-offs among the different SDGs. One example involves agricultural and water management strategies, which are not adequately integrated in a number of countries in the region. Similarly, though gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are increasingly part of national agendas, they are rarely mainstreamed in strategies to enhance economic growth and prosperity, or to address climate change.

Policymakers often cite the difficulties of information- and data-sharing across sectors, indicating the need for a cultural change across the cycle of planning, implementation, and follow-up and review. **Implementation of the 2030 Agenda provides the opportunity to trigger this cultural change and optimize integration to increase benefits and minimize trade-offs.**

### Data, monitoring and accountability

Little is known about results-based implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region and the impact of policies to achieve the SDGs. Periodic assessments or evaluations of policies and interventions are infrequent; public sharing of these is rare. Mechanisms to uphold State accountability to citizens are not always in place. Shrinking civic space effectively limits the assessment of State efforts, government expenditures, public-private partnerships and other concerns. In recent years, the Voluntary National Reviews, though jump-starting some coordination and consultation efforts, have remained largely descriptive rather than evaluative of implementation efforts, with a stronger focus on quantitative rather than qualitative analysis at the national level.

Despite notable efforts by national statistics offices to produce data to inform and monitor the implementation of the SDGs and national priorities, large gaps exist, particularly in the environmental dimension of sustainable development. Although disaggregation, including by sex, is critical in ensuring that policymaking and implementation meet the needs of all social groups and communities, it is very weak. This effectively limits the ability of the 2030 Agenda to reduce inequality and reach those who are the furthest behind. The production of timely, high-quality, disaggregated data is not only a technical pillar of achieving the 2030 Agenda; it is also a political one as it is fundamental to ensure inclusivity and justice.

## THE FOLLOWING ARE THE KEY BARRIERS TO DATA, MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY AS MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ARAB REGION

### Capacity and funding

Many Arab countries have established monitoring and follow-up and review mechanisms, where the national institution leading coordination of the 2030 Agenda works with the national statistics office or ministry of planning to develop periodic progress reports on key performance indicators most relevant to national development. Several countries have also conducted a mapping exercise involving the SDGs, their targets and indicators, and the national vision, strategies and development plans.

Data production remains inadequate across the 17 SDGs, however. In some cases, as in SDG 1 or SDG 10, methodological challenges become a barrier to achievement. Political considerations in some countries limit the production or release of data. The inability to define and measure poverty and inequality accurately and comprehensively has stunted the ability of policymakers to tackle social and economic challenges, and exacerbated injustice and discontent. Likewise, the limited capacity to produce data on climate change and biodiversity, among other examples, contributes greatly to the lack of responsive policies.



It is difficult to separate methodological challenges from those related to funding. Some countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, State of Palestine and Tunisia) have established mechanisms that periodically conduct household surveys to generate data. Limited resources, however, impact survey breadth and quality.

### Weak coordination

Institutional frameworks such as national reporting platforms or central databases to coordinate data flows among different entities at the national level and from national to global are often not in place or not fully operational. A wealth of administrative data remains tied to sectoral processes, preventing policymakers from accessing and using data in a coordinated fashion. Civil registration and vital statistics often remain contentious with conflicting figures recorded by different entities. To a lesser degree, data related to marriage registration and divorce are also scattered among courts and administrative units. This fragmentation has an adverse effect on the ability of the State to gather information from multiple perspectives and design effective, integrated policies. The fragmentation of data leads directly to the fragmentation of policies and interventions.



### Limited political will to generate and disaggregate data and make it public

The commitment to transparency is weak in some countries, especially when it comes to indicators relating to migratory status or unemployment. In over two thirds of the 14 Arab countries surveyed, a legal vacuum means disaggregation of data by specific groups or certain characteristics is not prioritized, despite increasing demand for such data.<sup>41</sup> Across the SDGs, those at risk of being left behind include groups such as non-nationals and domestic workers. Data are not adequately or routinely collected for groups with specific needs such as children, adolescents, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. For many SDGs, progress is also uneven at the subnational level, leaving many areas, especially rural ones, those far from the centre or pockets of informal urban settlements, at risk of falling further behind.

Arab countries have increasingly used Voluntary National Reviews as opportunities to broaden the scope of data collection. Nevertheless, the inaccessibility of data produced by national statistics systems including line ministries is detrimental to the increased accountability of the State and its institutions. Where national reporting platforms or dashboards have been established, data may not be available in Arabic and transparency remains limited. Civil society, academics and the media, to name a few, are not always able to access information easily and routinely. This discourages reflection, assessment and engagement with processes related to policies, public budgets and the like.



## What the region can do to accelerate progress on SDG 17

SDG 17 requires national, regional and global efforts with a view to how global and regional frameworks influence the national level, help address inequalities among countries and regions, and support a coherent and complementary shift towards sustainable development across the board.

### Finance

#### 1. Introduce SDG-centric fiscal policies:

- Reform fiscal policies to enhance the efficiency of public spending and allocate adequate resources to national sustainable development priorities.
- Reform tax policies given each country's socioeconomic realities, and adopt equitable and progressive models.
- Enhance compliance regimes and enforcement of tax legislation to use taxation effectively.

#### 2. Shift economic policies towards enhanced productivity and sustainability:

- Gear economic planning towards more productive and employment-generating sectors, and support diversification.
- Gear FDI towards productive industries and initiatives with a focus on medium- and long-term returns as well as technology and knowledge transfer.
- Strengthen the legal framework to reduce and mitigate risks and attract FDI.



- Reduce the cost of remittance transfer, and introduce regulatory frameworks to facilitate their investment and enhance the contributions of migrants to development in their country of origin.

### 3. Curb illicit financial flows:

- Enhance legislation and regulatory frameworks as well as enforcement mechanisms to prohibit illicit financial flows and trade misinvoicing, including practices related to the manipulation of prices, value and the quantity of goods.
- Build the capacities of law enforcement agencies and public prosecution offices to identify and target financial crimes.
- Enhance coordination at the regional level to address illicit financial flows and harmonize policies.

### 4. Address the debt crisis and strengthen the region's position in related global negotiations:

- Advocate multilateral debt relief for the least developed and conflict-affected countries.
- Reverse current trends in lending to improve access to concessional loans for middle-income countries, and renegotiate interest rates for non-oil economies to reduce the debt burden commensurate with their levels of growth.

### 5. Among developed countries, honor ODA commitments in line with the Addis Ababa Action Agenda:

- Increase the quantity of aid at least up to 0.7 per cent of the GNI of developed countries and in line with developing countries' national sustainable development priorities.
- Increase the quantity and quality of aid that supports human capabilities in developing countries, and ensures necessary knowledge and technology transfer.
- Enhance the transparency and accountability of ODA, and curb double counting and in-donor counting.
- Strengthen the integrity of different funding commitments, including those for medium and long-term sustainable development, climate finance and short-term humanitarian assistance.

## Technology

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### 1. Prioritize and invest in building the absorptive capacity of populations to use, adapt, customize and develop technology applications according to developmental needs:

- Reform educational systems and introduce pedagogical methodologies to encourage critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving across academic subjects and disciplines, and levels of education (early education to postgraduate).
- Invest in lifelong learning initiatives to build the absorptive capacity of those not enrolled in formal education.
- Integrate vocational education training at secondary and post-secondary levels in national educational reform policies with a view to increasing the scope of skills, addressing the scarcity of mid-level or craft competencies, and contributing to industrialization.

- Promote the digitalization of certain public services and transactions as an effective vector for developing the required infrastructures and private sector initiatives to boost this sector.

### 2. Ensure inclusive access to technology:

- Improve regulatory frameworks to expand coverage of necessary infrastructure to all areas and communities.
- Invest in local development, and promote technological centres or units in different areas, including rural ones.

### 3. Introduce strategies to improve R&D:

- Increase allocated budgets for investment in R&D, and enhance the conditions for researchers in universities and research centres.
- Improve links between universities, the research system and industry, and focus research priorities on productive sector needs.
- Encourage private sector contributions to R&D and innovation initiatives.
- Lift restrictions on freedom of speech to encourage the vibrant and active engagement of researchers with public policy and implementation of the SDGs.

### 4. Facilitate the emergence and establishment of small and medium enterprises:

- Establish national and regional funds and reform laws to facilitate loans, grants, venture capital, equity sharing, etc. to support new entrepreneurs.
- Simplify and mainstream regulations to establish and close new start-ups and small and medium-sized enterprises.

## Trade

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### 1. Strengthen trade policies and enhance synergies with economic planning:

- Design forward-looking trade policies that capitalize on the potential of existing human, natural and financial resources, and link to a vision of progressively improving trade competitiveness.
- Restructure the economy to prioritize productive sectors, support sustainable manufacturing and invest in green technologies.
- Enhance sustainable agricultural practices, agricultural productivity and related infrastructure, and harmonize logistical frameworks for food production and distribution.

### 2. Enhance intraregional trade:

- Ensure the full implementation of the Pan Arab Free Trade Agreement, extend its coverage to services and reinvigorate work towards an Arab Customs Union.

- Enhance efforts to facilitate the mobility of people, labour and investments, and harmonize related standards, policies and procedures.

### 3. Improve the region's representation in global economic governance institutions and enhance its standing in negotiations:

- Take political steps to ensure common or harmonized positions among governments in trade agreements, and identify the necessary capacities to improve negotiations.
- Lift restrictions on regional and global market access for products and services originating in the least developed countries, including through elimination or reduction of prohibitive tariffs.

## Data, monitoring and accountability

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- Scale up the production and use of high-quality data in line with international standards, link statistical capacity and funding in national development plans, and commit necessary financial resources to producing harmonized, high-quality, disaggregated data.
- Prioritize the production of high-quality and timely data disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

- Increase coordination between national statistics offices and all national entities producing data, including administrative data; increase coordination between national statistics offices and United Nations entities working at the national, regional and global levels.
- Establish and fully operationalize national reporting platforms with clearly defined sources for each indicator as per standardized metadata, systematic channels of coordination between all data sources, and dissemination and transparency mechanisms according to international criteria.
- Increase transparency in the production and use of data, enhance the legislative framework, and operationalize commitments to make data publicly available and facilitate access.
- Increase open access to data, including microdata, to generate knowledge on sustainable development in the region, advance intersectoral analyses, and enhance the engagement of different stakeholders in monitoring and evaluating policies and interventions.
- Integrate and build capacity to use alternative data sources, including big data and geospatial data.

## SDG 17 targets and indicators in the Arab region

Target	Indicator	Data
<b>Finance</b>		
<b>17.1</b> Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection	<b>17.1.1</b> Total government revenue as a proportion of GDP, by source	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.
	<b>17.1.2</b> Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.
<b>17.2</b> Developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance (ODA/GNI) to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries; ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries	<b>17.2.1</b> Net official development assistance, total and to least developed countries, as a proportion of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee donors' gross national income (GNI)	Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

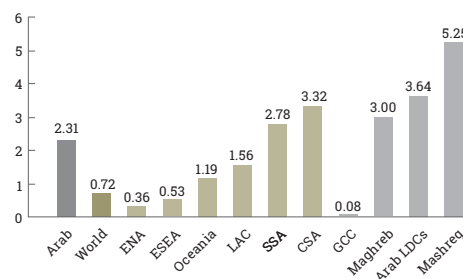
**17.3**  
Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources

**17.3.1**  
Foreign direct investment (FDI), official development assistance and South-South cooperation as a proportion of total domestic budget

**17.3.2**  
Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

Figure 1 Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total GDP (percentage)

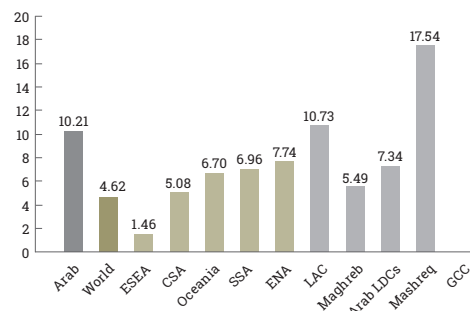


Note: All means are weighted by total GDP in current United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2016, taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Djibouti (2015), Algeria, Comoros, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen (2016).

**17.4**  
Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress

**17.4.1**  
Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services

Figure 2 Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services (percentage)



Note: All means are weighted by total exports of goods and services in current United States dollars (i.e., the denominator) for 2016, taken from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2019). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Comoros (2014), Djibouti (2015), Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia (2016). According to SDG Indicators Metadata Repository (United Nations Statistics Division 2019b), "this indicator is the percentage of debt services (principle and interest payments) to the exports of goods and services, where debt services refer only to public and publicly guaranteed debt". This is one measure of whether debt levels are sustainable. A lower ratio indicates a more sustainable country/territory/regional debt structure. Data for this indicator cover only 116 countries/territories. High-income countries/territories, including the GCC countries, all have missing values for not reporting, which should be taken into account when analysing the averages.

**17.5**  
Adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries

**17.5.1**  
Number of countries that adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

## Technology

### 17.6

Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism

#### 17.6.1

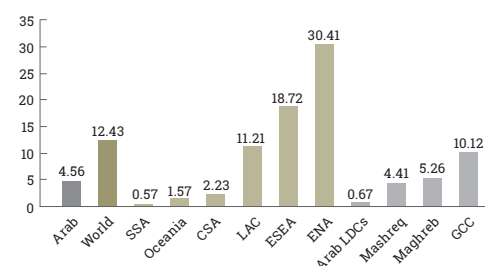
Number of science and/or technology cooperation agreements and programmes between countries, by type of cooperation

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

#### 17.6.2

Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by speed

Figure 3 Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (percentage)



Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of Iraq in 2010 and all 21 other countries in 2016.

### 17.7

Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed

#### 17.7.1

Total amount of approved funding for developing countries to promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

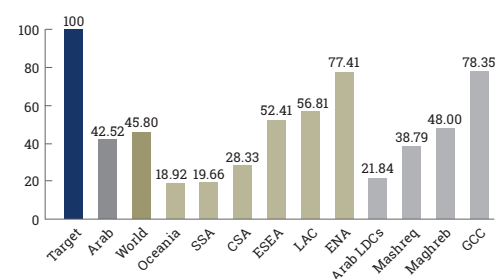
### 17.8

Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology

#### 17.8.1

Proportion of individuals using the Internet

Figure 4 Internet users per 100 inhabitants (percentage)



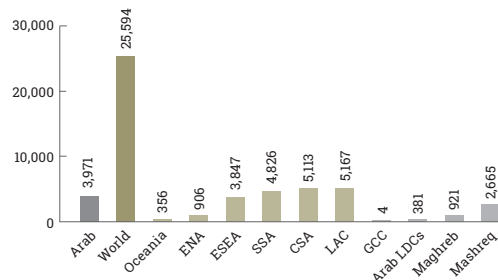
Note: All means are population weighted using the latest (2015) population estimates (United Nations Population Division, 2017; United Nations Statistics Division, 2019b). The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of all 22 countries in 2016.

## Capacity-building

**17.9**  
 Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation

**17.9.1**  
 Dollar value of financial and technical assistance (including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation) committed to developing countries

Figure 5 Total official development assistance (gross disbursement) for technical cooperation (millions of constant 2016 United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Oman (2010), Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen (2016). This indicator only covers recipient countries/territories. It excludes the 33 donor countries/territories from different regions that are listed by the OECD.

## Trade

**17.10**  
 Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda

**17.10.1**  
 Worldwide weighted tariff-average

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**17.11**  
 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020

**17.11.1**  
 Developing countries' and least developed countries' share of global exports

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

**17.12**  
 Realize timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, including by ensuring that preferential rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries are transparent and simple, and contribute to facilitating market access

**17.12.1**  
 Average tariffs faced by developing countries, least developed countries and small island developing States

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

## Systemic Issues

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### Policy and institutional coherence

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#### 17.13

Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence

#### 17.13.1

Macroeconomic Dashboard

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

#### 17.14

Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

#### 17.14.1

Number of countries with mechanisms in place to enhance policy coherence of sustainable development

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

#### 17.15

Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development

#### 17.15.1

Extent of use of country-owned results frameworks and planning tools by providers of development cooperation

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

### Multi-stakeholder partnerships

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#### 17.16

Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

#### 17.16.1

Number of countries reporting progress in multi-stakeholder development effectiveness monitoring frameworks that support the achievement of the sustainable development goals

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

#### 17.17

Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

#### 17.17.1

Amount of United States dollars committed to public-private and civil society partnerships

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

## Data, monitoring and accountability

### 17.18

By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

### 17.18.1

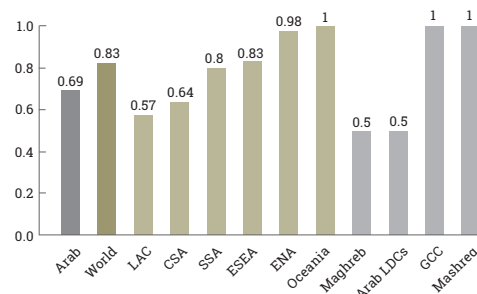
Proportion of sustainable development indicators produced at the national level with full disaggregation when relevant to the target, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Adopted criteria to obtain a regional average are not met for this indicator.

### 17.18.2

Number of countries that have national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics

Figure 6 Countries with national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (1-0 dummy variable)

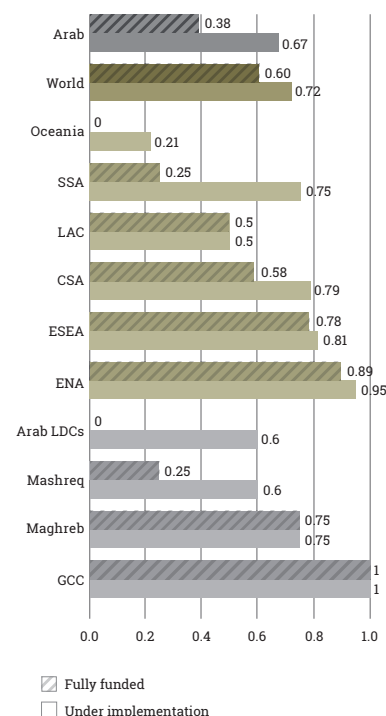


Note: Global, regional and subregional aggregates are the simple means of the country values, thus representing the share of countries with national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics in a certain region/subregion. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries in 2018: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia.



**17.18.3**  
**Number of countries with a national statistical plan that is fully funded and under implementation, by source of funding**

**Figure 7** Countries with national statistical plans that are fully funded, and countries with national statistical plans that are under implementation (1-0 dummy variables)



Note: Global, regional and subregional aggregates of both series are the simple means of the country values, thus representing the share of countries with national statistical plans that are fully funded or under implementation, respectively, in a certain region/subregion.

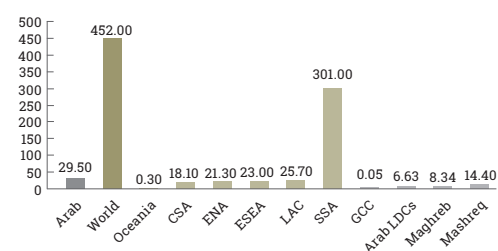
The calculated Arab regional aggregate of the first series includes the data values of the following Arab countries in 2018: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Sudan and Tunisia.

The calculated Arab regional aggregate of the second series includes the data values of the following countries in 2018: Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen.

**17.19**  
**By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries**

**17.19.1**  
**Dollar value of all resources made available to strengthen statistical capacity in developing countries**

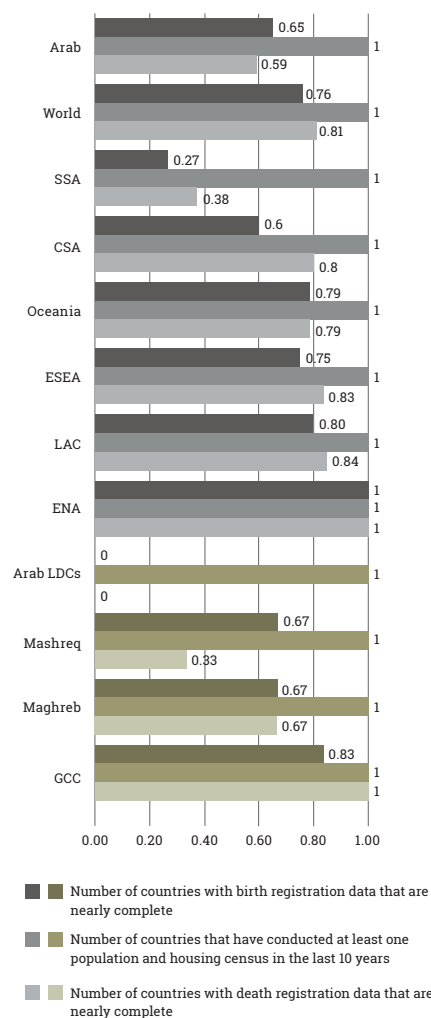
**Figure 8** Dollar value of all resources made available to strengthen statistical capacity in developing countries (millions of current United States dollars)



Note: Aggregates are the total sum of country values. The calculated Arab regional aggregate includes the data values of the following countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2012), Comoros, Saudi Arabia (2013), Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Somalia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. This indicator only covers recipient countries/territories and excludes the 33 donor countries/territories from different regions that are listed by the OECD.

**17.19.2**  
**Proportion of countries that (a) have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years; and (b) have achieved 100 per cent birth registration and 80 per cent death registration**

**Figure 9** Countries with birth registration data that are at least 90 per cent complete, countries with death registration data that are at least 75 per cent complete, and countries that have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years (1-0 dummy variables)



Note: Global, regional and subregional aggregates of the three series are the simple means of the country values, thus representing the share of countries with birth/death registration data that are nearly complete or of countries that have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years in a certain region/subregion.

The calculated Arab regional aggregate of the birth registration data series includes the data values of the following countries and years: Syrian Arab Republic (2015), Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen (2016).

The calculated Arab regional aggregate of the housing and population census data series includes the data values of the following countries and years: Djibouti (2009), Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (2010), Kuwait (2011), Mauritania (2013), Morocco, Tunisia (2014), Jordan, Qatar (2015), Egypt, Comoros and State of Palestine (2017).

The calculated Arab regional aggregate of the death registration data series includes the data values of the following countries and years: Djibouti, Syrian Arab Republic (2015), Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, United Arab Emirates, Tunisia and Yemen (2016).

Note: Central and Southern Asia (CSA), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (ESEA), Europe and Northern America (ENA), Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), Arab Least Developed Countries (Arab LDCs), Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand); Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

All figures are based on the Global SDG Indicators Database (United Nations Statistics Division, 2018) except for the inclusion of updated data (United Nations Statistics Division, 2019a) for the following indicators: 17.18.2 [Countries with national statistical legislation that complies with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (1-0 dummy variable)], 17.18.3 [Countries with national statistical plans that are fully funded, and countries with national statistical plans that are under implementation (1-0 dummy variables)].

## ENDNOTES

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1. IMF, 2019b.
2. ESCWA, 2018b.
3. Ibid.
4. OECD, 2019.
5. World Bank, 2019.
6. ESCWA, 2018b.
7. Ibid.
8. UNESCO, 2015. See also the targets and indicators of SDG 9 (indicator 9.5.1).
9. Cornell University, INSEAD and WIPO, 2019.
10. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 4.
11. ITU, 2019a.
12. ITU, 2019b.
13. ESCWA, forthcoming.
14. Ibid. Countries covered in this report are: Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and United Arab Emirates.
15. Based on values of the "share of medium- and high-tech activities" from UNIDO, 2019.
16. ESCWA, 2018a.
17. ESCWA calculations based on ESCWA, 2018a and trade data collected from national sources.
18. ESCWA calculations based on trade data collected from national sources. See also ESCWA, 2018a.
19. The value for the European Union is from 2016 and for the ASEAN region from 2015. Sources: European Union, 2017; ASEAN Statistics, 2016.
20. ESCWA calculations based on trade data collected from national sources. See also ESCWA, 2018a.
21. Alsaidi, forthcoming.
22. Ibid.
23. ESCWA 2019c.
24. Ibid.
25. ESCWA 2018b.
26. Ibid.
27. Calculated by ESCWA, see figure 2.
28. ESCWA, 2018b.
29. World Bank, 2020. Note that regional country grouping in this statement correspond with the World Bank definition of the Middle East and North Africa.
30. IMF, 2019a.
31. Sarangi and others, 2018; ESCWA, 2018b.
32. United Nations, 2019.
33. ESCWA, 2017.
34. ITU, 2019c.
35. UNESCO, 2015. See also the targets and indicators of SDG 9 (indicator 9.5.1).
36. ESCWA, 2019a.
37. World Bank Group, 2019.
38. ESCWA, 2015.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Jafar, 2019. Countries surveyed are: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

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Achieving sustainable development in the Arab region faces structural barriers that are often shared among the 22 Arab countries, despite variations in income level, natural resources, and demographic profiles. Transformative change in the Arab region entails dismantling those barriers to unleash the existing potential of its people, and to meet the ambition of its commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The present report charts the regional trajectory for achieving the 2030 Agenda, and analyses where the region stands on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of each SDG in relation to the global indicator framework adopted by the General Assembly in 2017. Mobilizing the interdisciplinary knowledge and expertise of ESCWA, regional United Nations entities and a group of esteemed experts, it highlights SDG interlinkages, examines the main barriers to achievement, sheds light on those most at risk of being left behind, and identifies the most critical entry points for moving forward. The findings urge structural changes across social, economic, political, cultural and environmental dimensions, and illustrate the possibilities for regional transformation



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



International  
Labour  
Organization



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.



UNEP



United Nations Population Fund



UNITED NATIONS  
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

UN HABITAT



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

unicef  
for every child



UNDRR  
UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UN WOMEN

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women