



المنتدى العربي للتنمية المستدامة

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13 CLIMATE ACTION



SDG 13 CLIMATE ACTION

Take urgent action to combat
climate change and its impacts

The impact of climate change is acute in the Arab region, with temperatures continuing to climb. Vulnerability is on the rise as vast numbers of people confront growing water scarcity and droughts. Climate-related disasters and extreme weather events are taking a toll through loss of life, economic damages and displacement. Providing humanitarian assistance in response to these events has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as has the provision of development assistance aimed at reducing socioeconomic vulnerability.

Despite the economic slowdown caused by the pandemic, record levels of greenhouse gases remain in the atmosphere trapping heat.¹ The period 2011-2020 was the warmest decade on record, with 2020 being one of the three hottest years on record.²

While many countries are investing in climate adaptation, diversifying their economies, and incorporating climate considerations in national development plans and disaster risk reduction strategies, more comprehensive and innovative financial instruments are needed to secure the resources required to ensure their implementation. This is particularly important given fiscal tightening owing to the redirection of public resources to respond to the pandemic. This has created a unique opportunity to pursue green recovery efforts that can enhance resilience to climate shocks while recovering from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. Integrated solutions must draw on science and risk assessments to inform sustainable development pathways. Regional and multi-stakeholder efforts can support collective understanding and climate action at the national and local levels.

1 World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Carbon dioxide levels continue at record levels, despite COVID-19 lockdown, 23 November 2020.

2 WMO, The State of the Global Climate, 2020.

Impact of COVID-19 on SDG 13 in the Arab region



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 in 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. Climate change affects transboundary water resources that support the water, energy and agriculture sectors, and impacts natural ecosystems which compounds the climate security risks facing the region (SDG16).

Adaptation to climate change is thus imperative, particularly to enhance resilience as the region works to respond and recover from the pandemic. 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. The economic slowdown provides opportunities for sustainable energy transitions (SDG 7) and job creation (SDG 8) during the formulation of COVID-19 economic stimulus packages.

Access to climate finance under fiscal tightening due to COVID-19

The quantity and the quality of climate finance received by Arab countries does not meet their needs and priorities, as articulated in national development plans, nationally determined contributions (NDCs), and UNFCCC communications. Existing support is also unequally

distributed in the region, with just 5 per cent benefiting Arab least developed countries (LDCs).³ Loans to Arab countries also significantly exceed grant flows for climate finance by a factor of 10 to 1, while climate finance for mitigation exceeds funding for adaptation by a factor of 4 to 1, even though adaptation is the priority for the region.⁴ More innovative instruments are also needed to secure financial flows for climate action (SDG16).

Greening the financial system can advance access to climate finance as part of COVID-19 recovery efforts, and should include debt relief for indebted Arab countries to allow them the fiscal space to pursue climate commitments. However, these efforts should be aligned with national development priorities and policy commitments that draw on a sound scientific base and improved technical and research capacity.

Measures taken by Arab Governments

1. Updating national policies and commitments and strengthening coherence

SDG target 13.2 calls on countries to integrate climate measures into national policies, strategies and plans. Most national development plans and visions issued by Arab countries after 2015 mention climate change, while most issued in 2015 or earlier do not. Moreover, not all national development plans and visions that mention climate change include climate-specific targets. Among those that do, mitigation targets are more common than adaptation targets, although adaptation is the priority for the region.

All Arab countries except one have submitted NDCs in line with Paris Agreement commitments, most of which include reference to mitigation and adaptation. The pandemic has also fostered renewed interest in incorporating health and disaster risk reduction considerations in NDCs and national plans, including measures related to air pollution and transport. Some Arab countries have noted that COVID-19 had slowed their work on climate change and delayed revision of their NDCs by the December 2020 target set in the Paris Agreement. However, at least six Arab States (Bahrain, Jordan, Lebanon, the State of Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia) are updating their NDCs for submission in 2021.

Efforts are also underway to pursue coherence across national commitments adopted under the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, in line with the 2030 Agenda. This includes the adoption of new tools and metrics for measuring and monitoring progress, and efforts to increase data disaggregation.

2. Identifying financial gaps and pursuing innovative finance.

Eleven Arab countries have indicated that they need \$378 billion in finance to implement their NDCs in their

first round of submissions under the Paris Agreement, including \$343 billion to implemented NDC targets that are conditional on receiving public international support. Public international financial flows to meet these commitments have been limited. Since 2016, the Green Climate Fund has funded national projects valued at \$1.7 billion in six Arab countries (Bahrain, the Comoros, Egypt, Morocco, the State of Palestine, and the Sudan). Another five Arab countries (Djibouti, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania and Tunisia) are among recipients of multi-country project funds that are not exclusive to the Arab region.

More effort is needed to increase financial flows to Arab LDCs, in accordance with SDG indicator 13.b.1, and to other Arab countries with high vulnerability to climate change. In response, UNFCCC, the League of Arab States and ESCWA are collaborating on an Arab climate finance mobilization and access strategy, within the context of a needs-based finance project launched in the Arab region in consultation with Arab countries and experts in November 2019.⁵

At the country level, Egypt issued the first sovereign green bond in the Arab region, which raised \$750 million for national projects in September 2020. A further \$4.75 billion in green bonds, green sukuk, and green debt has been issued by public companies from five Arab countries since 2016. Private issuances are slightly lower at \$3.7 billion. The Islamic Development Bank issued a 1 billion euro sharia-compliant green sukuk in November 2019, with proceeds earmarked for green and climate-related projects. Other innovative financial instruments being considered to facilitate access to climate finance in the region include climate/SDG debt swaps under a new initiative launched by ESCWA.

³ ESCWA calculations based on OECD, Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013-2018, 2020.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNFCCC, League of Arab States and ESCWA, An inception workshop for the needs-based climate finance project, Cairo, 6-7 November 2019.

Most at risk of being left behind

Climate change aggravates and multiplies existing threats faced by poor and vulnerable communities. Lacking resources to adapt to changes or cope with shocks, they are likely to be the most severely impacted. A detailed review of the Arab region revealed that SDG 13 targets will not be met by 2030 for the following social groups, whose vulnerability has been amplified by the pandemic.⁶



The rural poor are especially vulnerable because their livelihoods rely on water for agriculture. Moreover, they suffer from inadequate housing and infrastructure.



Women and children across the region are more likely to suffer continued losses after a disaster, including through displacement and the disruption of livelihoods and social networks.



Informal settlements suffer from poor building construction, tight spaces, limited access to water and inadequate wastewater management systems, which present risks to health during the pandemic, and increase their vulnerability to flash floods and heatwaves. This was most recently experienced in Somalia, the Sudan

and Yemen, where flashfloods and landslides displaced communities. Moreover, access to humanitarian relief was hampered owing to disrupted road networks and preventive health measures put in place in response to the pandemic.



Young and future generations will bear the cumulative impact of the crisis. 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 young people face an additional barrier from education systems that leave them without the necessary knowledge and tools to mobilize around climate action. The global pandemic has also exposed the implications of the digital divide, with students without access to information technology unable to take advantage of online learning arrangements put in place in response to COVID-19 restrictions. The pandemic is also stymying employment opportunities for young adults, which could be generated through green recovery efforts aimed at climate resilience and economic transformation.

6 ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020.

Policy recommendations for ensuring an inclusive recovery and achieving SDG 13 by 2030

The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 identifies the following recommendations to accelerate the achievement of SDG 13 in the region and support

action on other SDGs. These recommendations also facilitate the COVID-19 recovery, and enhance resilience to future shocks and crises.⁷

Develop coherent national responses to climate change mitigation and adaptation, in line with global agreements and national circumstances

Enhance institutional and technical capacities in the region to address climate change

Raise awareness and engage all stakeholders in transforming patterns of consumption and production, including the use of natural and other resources

Mobilize additional finance and technology, and accelerate capacity-building linked to climate action in the region, drawing on public and private sources

7 For a comprehensive analysis of these recommendations, see ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020.

Key facts on SDG 13

ARAB REGION	WORLD
Number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters per 100,000 population	
Number of people affected by disaster per 100,000 people	
94.26 in 2017	857.37 in 2017
Number of deaths due to disaster per 100,000 people	
0.23 in 2017	0.06 in 2017
Number of missing persons due to disaster per 100,000 people	
0.79 in 2017	0.41 in 2017

Countries adopting national disaster risk reduction strategies

By end of 2020, five Arab countries had finalized and endorsed their DRR national strategies (Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, the Sudan and the United Arab Emirates), and eight countries had finalized a draft national DRR strategy (Algeria, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Tunisia).⁸

Local governments adopting and implementing local disaster risk reduction strategies

Local plans were developed in Egypt (one city), Jordan (seven cities), Lebanon (three cities), Mauritania (four cities), the State of Palestine (one city), the Sudan (one city), Tunisia (three cities) and the United Arab Emirates (one city).

Source: ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020.

⁸ UNDRR, Fifth Arab Partnership Meeting for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2-9 November 2020.