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**Round-table discussion:
progress towards water-related Sustainable Development Goals
in the Arab region**

Summary

The present document serves as a background paper for a round-table discussion on progress in implementing water-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Arab region. It provides an overview of progress and remaining gaps, highlighting the unique challenges faced by the region owing to limited water resources, climate change, and the unequal distribution of resources.

The Committee on Water Resources is invited to engage in and enrich the round-table discussion by examining regional and national challenges, and providing insights on means to accelerate implementation of water-related SDGs in the region.

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Introduction

1. The present document serves as a background paper for a round-table discussion on progress in implementing water-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Arab region. It provides an overview of progress and remaining gaps, highlighting the unique challenges faced by the region owing to limited water resources, climate change, and the unequal distribution of resources.

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

2. People are at the core of the Charter of the United Nations. To that end, on 28 July 2010, the General Assembly passed resolution [64/292](#) on the human right to water and sanitation, acknowledging the importance of equitable access to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as an integral component of the realization of all human rights. Without access to adequate drinking water and sanitation, people cannot thrive. In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, with Goal 6 stressing the need for safe, affordable and accessible water and sanitation.

3. The Arab region faces unique water challenges owing to its arid climate and limited water resources. It experiences water scarcity, drought and unequal distribution of water resources. This unequal distribution is caused by rapid population growth, increasing water demand, and limited resources. Water scarcity affects the region's agriculture, energy production, and economic development. The region also faces environmental challenges, such as water pollution, desertification and salinization. Many of these challenges are worsening with climate change. These specific challenges, unique to the Arab region, make achieving SDG 6 even more daunting – without coordinated and significant effort, the region will not achieve SDG 6 by 2030.

A. SDG target 6.1: By 2030, achieve universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all

4. Safely managed drinking water services must use an improved drinking water source accessible on premises, available when needed, and free of faecal and priority chemical contamination. "Improved" drinking water sources include piped supplies, boreholes, tube wells, protected dug wells, protected springs, rainwater, water kiosks, and packaged and delivered water.¹

5. Access to safely managed drinking water services increased from 75 to 77 per cent in the Arab region between 2015 and 2020. Since 2015, over 41 million more people in the region have gained access to safely managed drinking water services. As seen in figure 1, a significant portion of the region still needs to move from basic and limited services to safely managed water services. Furthermore, considerable improvements must be made to meet SDG target 6.1 on achieving universal and equitable access by 2030.

6. A key component of SDG target 6.1 is universal access to water. From the perspective of the Arab region, some aspects related to water availability are not well captured in the indicator. In many Arab countries, a connection to piped water systems does not necessarily imply a continuous water supply, which impacts household resource availability. The Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines a water supply as "available when needed" based on survey respondents having sufficient water available when needed during the last week or month.² Based on 2020 JMP data, 13 Arab countries do not have universally available water supply when needed.

¹ [SDG Indicators](#).

² World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), [Safely managed drinking water: thematic report on drinking water](#), 2017.

Table 1. Proportion of national population using improved water supplies, 2020

Country	Available when needed	Country	Available when needed
Algeria	72.4%	Morocco	92.4%
Bahrain	>99%	Oman	–
Comoros	–	Qatar	>99%
Djibouti	–	Saudi Arabia	–
Egypt	71.5%	Somalia	59.8%
Iraq	73.5%	State of Palestine	87.6%
Jordan	85.7%	Sudan	83.6%
Kuwait	>99%	Syrian Arab Republic	93.6%
Lebanon	92.3%	Tunisia	80.5%
Libya	95.9%	United Arab Emirates	>99%
Mauritania	–	Yemen	56.5%

Source: Joint Monitoring Programme.

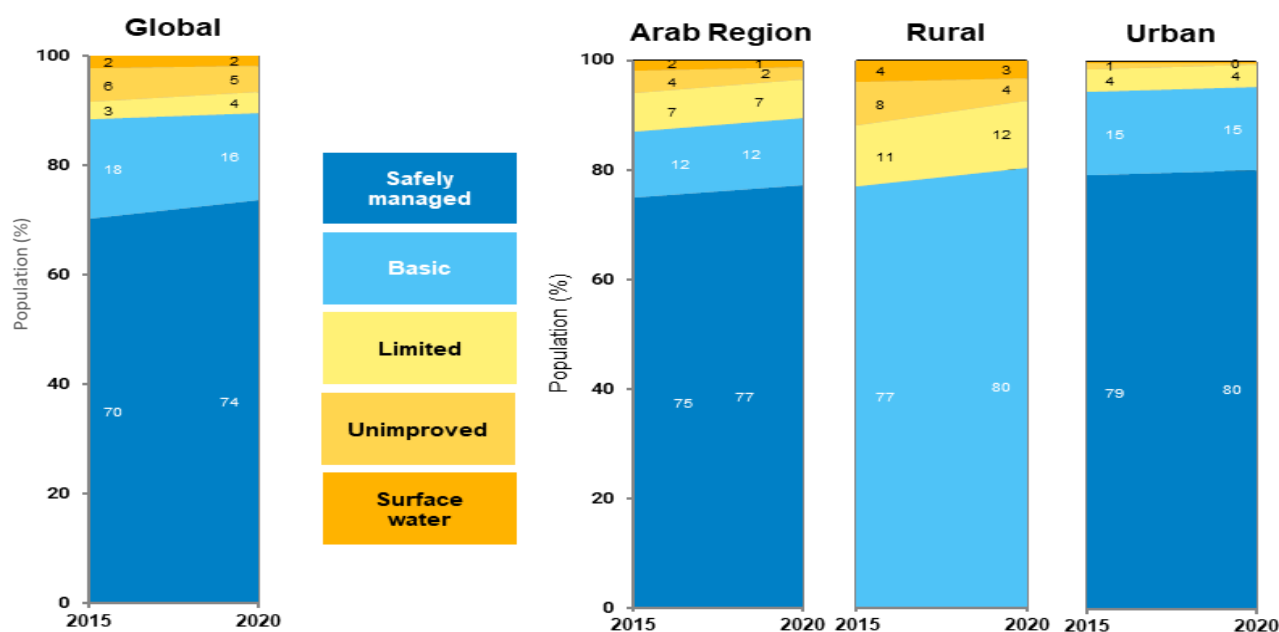
Note: “>99%” indicates that a country has universal coverage; and “–” indicates that a country did not report information for 2020 or did not meet JMP minimum requirements for data quality.

7. The most elusive component of SDG target 6.1 is affordability. The affordability of water services has the potential to undermine water availability. Measuring water service affordability remains one of the most significant hurdles to addressing affordability. The World Bank and JMP have piloted a water resource affordability metric, defined as the ratio of the amount spent on water to a household’s total consumption. Nevertheless, without a universal definition and methodological approach to calculate affordability, a consensus is needed on a clear definition and broadly applicable methodology at the country level. Close to 20 per cent of the populations of Northern Africa and Western Asia have experienced total household expenditure of more than 2 per cent on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.³ There is a significant overlap between the Arab region and Northern Africa and Western Asia.

Table 2. SDG indicator 6.1.1: Service definitions

Service level	Definition
Safely managed	Drinking water from an improved source that is accessible on premises, available when needed and free from faecal and priority chemical contamination
Basic	Drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time is not more than 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing
Limited	Drinking water from an improved source, provided collection time exceeds 30 minutes for a round trip, including queuing
Unimproved	Drinking water from an unprotected dug well or unprotected spring
Surface water	Drinking water directly from a river dam, lake, pond, stream, canal or irrigation canal

³ United Nations, [Sustainable Development Goal 6: Synthesis Report on Water and Sanitation](#), 2018.

Figure 1. SDG target 6.1 in the Arab region, 2015–2020

Source: JMP, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene*, 2022.

B. SDG target 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

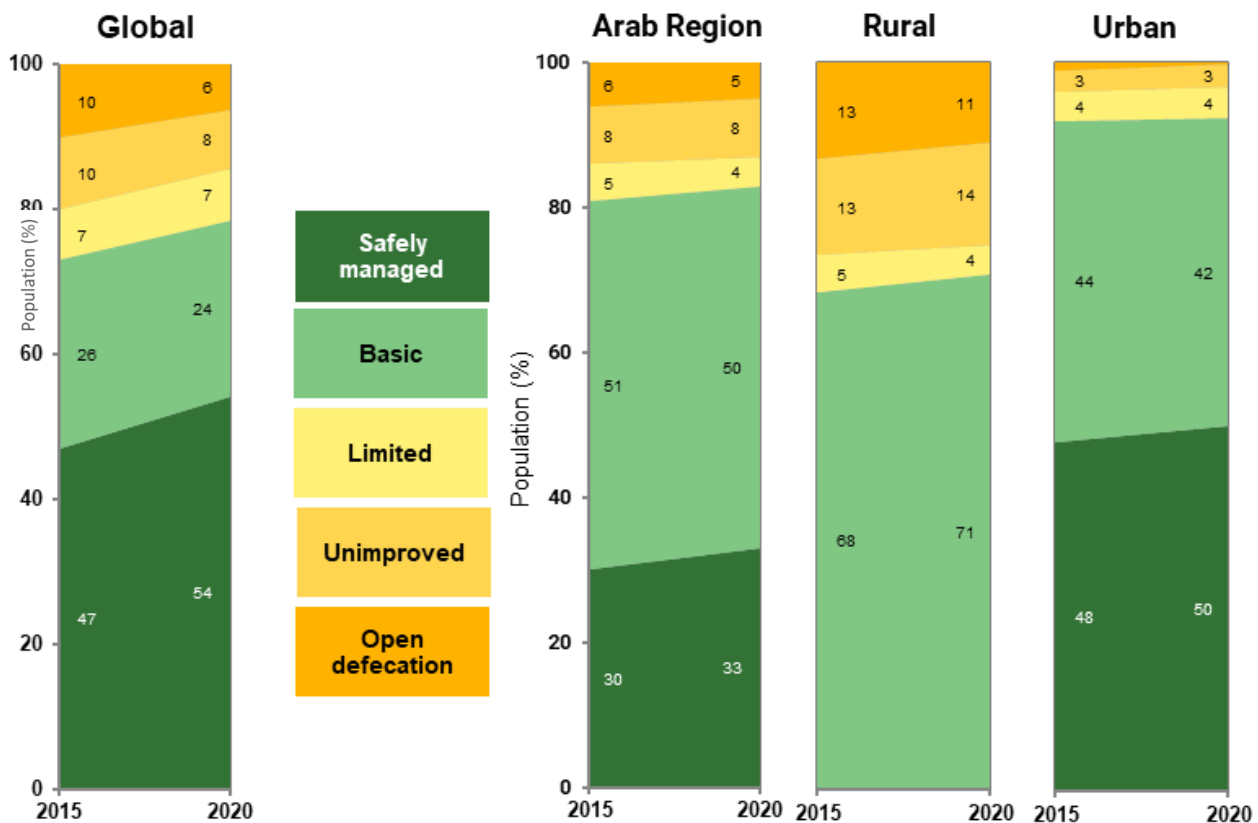
8. Safely managed sanitation services are defined as using an improved sanitation facility not shared with other households, and where excreta are safely disposed of in situ or removed and treated off-site. “Improved” sanitation facilities are those designed to hygienically separate human excreta from human contact. These include wet sanitation technologies, such as flush and pour flush toilets connected to sewers, septic tanks, pit latrines, and dry sanitation technologies.⁴

9. Access to safely managed sanitation services increased from 30 to 33 per cent in the Arab region between 2015 and 2020. Since 2015, over 26 million more people in the region have gained access to safely managed sanitation services. As seen in figure 2, a considerable portion of the region still needs to move from basic, limited, unimproved or open defecation (with open defecation being most notable in urban settings) to safely managed sanitation services. Furthermore, considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.2 on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation for all by 2030.

Table 3. SDG 6.2.1: Service definitions

Service level	Definition
Safely managed	Use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households and where excreta are safely disposed of in situ or removed and treated off-site
Basic	Use of improved facilities that are not shared with other households
Limited	Use of improved facilities that are shared with other households
Unimproved	Use of pit latrines without a slab or platform, hanging latrines or bucket latrines
Open defecation	Disposal of human faeces in fields, forests, bushes, open bodies of water, beaches or other open places, or with solid waste

⁴ SDG Indicators.

Figure 2. SDG target 6.2 for the Arab region, 2015–2020

Source: JMP, *Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene*, 2022.

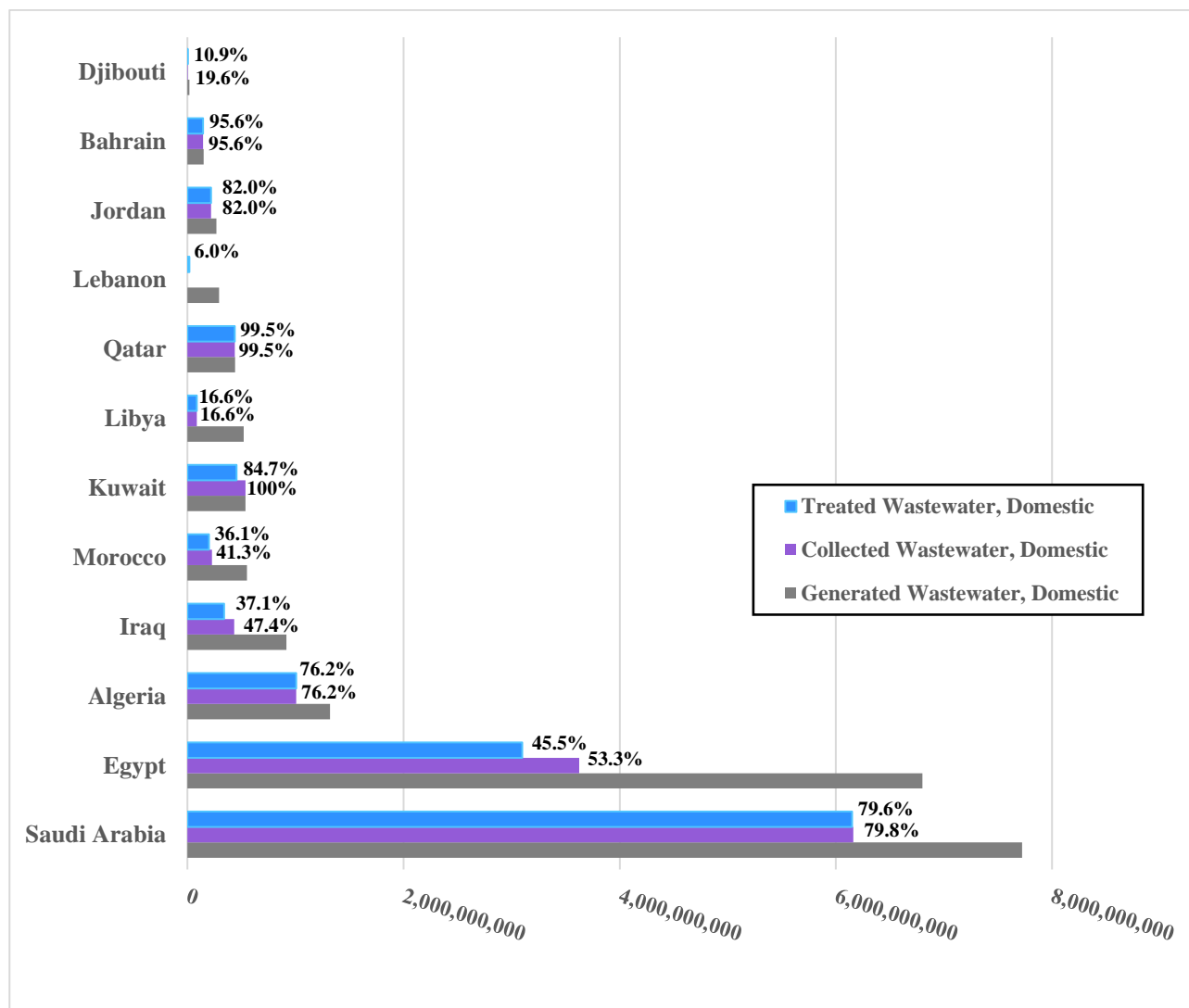
C. SDG target 6.3: By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally

1. SDG indicator 6.3.1: Proportion of domestic and industrial wastewater flows safely treated

10. This indicator measures the volumes of wastewater generated through different activities, and the volumes of wastewater safely treated before discharge into the environment. Wastewater flows are classified into industrial, services and domestic flows. The proportion of each waste stream safely treated before discharge to the environment is calculated to the extent possible.⁵ The proposed indicator does not capture the “reuse” component included in the target. However, this is important given that the safe reuse of treated wastewater is highly relevant to the water-scarce Arab region, because of its potential to contribute to the most water-intensive sector, namely agriculture, and would therefore have implications for food safety and stability in the region.

11. The overall proportion of wastewater flows safely treated remains low in Arab countries. Apart from some Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.3 on improving water quality, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and increasing recycling and safe reuse by 2030 (figure 3).

⁵ SDG Indicators.

Figure 3. Domestic wastewater (Cubic metres and percentage)

Source: SDG 6 Data Portal; Republic of Lebanon, *Updated National Water Sector Strategy 2020–2035*, 2020, annex II.

12. The Arab region has relatively good access to improved sanitation coverage (92–96 per cent in urban areas, and 86–89 per cent in rural areas). However, connections to sewerage networks and wastewater treatment facilities remain limited in many parts of the region. The absence of connected wastewater systems complicates treatment and reduces wastewater reuse. Moreover, even when wastewater is safely treated, wastewater reuse remains limited in many Arab countries despite water scarcity and wastewater's potential value and reliability.

2. SDG indicator 6.3.2: Proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality

13. Ambient water quality refers to natural, untreated water in rivers, lakes and groundwaters, and represents a combination of natural influences and the impact of all anthropogenic activities. The indicator relies on water quality data derived from in situ measurements, and the analysis of samples collected from surface and groundwaters. Water quality is assessed by means of core physical and chemical parameters that reflect natural water quality related to climatological and geological factors, together with significant effects on water quality. Countries select river, lake and groundwater bodies to monitor, which are representative and significant for the assessment and management of water quality. The quality status of individual water bodies is classified

based on the compliance of available water quality monitoring data for the core parameters with target values defined by the country.⁶

14. Of the six reporting Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Sudan, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates), only Jordan is on track to meet SDG indicator 6.3.2 on the proportion of bodies of water with good ambient water quality by 2030. More Arab countries need to begin reporting to adequately assess the region's progress.

D. SDG target 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

1. SDG indicator 6.4.1: Change in water-use efficiency over time

15. Water use efficiency is defined as the change in the ratio of the value added to the volume of water use. Value added is defined as the net output of a sector after adding up all outputs and subtracting intermediate inputs.⁷

16. Average water-use efficiency decreased by 0.7 per cent in the Arab region between 2015 and 2019. For 2019, the Arab region's average water-use efficiency was \$10.1 per cubic metre; the lowest in the region was \$0.2 per cubic metre, and the highest was \$209.1 per cubic metre. Considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.4 on substantially increasing water-use efficiency and ensuring sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to significantly reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity by 2030.

2. SDG indicator 6.4.2: Level of water stress: freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources

17. The level of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources) is the ratio between total freshwater withdrawn by all major sectors and total renewable freshwater resources, after taking into account environmental flow requirements.⁸

18. The average level of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources) increased by 4 per cent in the Arab region between 2015 and 2019. For 2019, the Arab region's average level of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources) was 120.8 per cent; the lowest in the region was 0.8 per cent (in the Comoros), and the highest was 3,850 per cent (in Kuwait). There is considerable disparity in terms of freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources across the Arab region. As seen in figure 4, between 2000 and 2019, 14 Arab countries experienced an increase in the level of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources).

19. SDG indicator 6.4.2 reveals some challenges in estimating the level of water stress in the Arab region, such as in the State of Palestine, for example. For 2019, the Arab region's average level of water stress (freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources) was 120.8 per cent compared with 47 per cent in the State of Palestine, indicating that the State of Palestine is much less water stressed than the average Arab country. However, because of the limitations placed on access to water supplies owing to occupation, this does not accurately reflect the reality of water scarcity in the country. The actual need in this scenario is substantially more than what is measured by indicator 6.4.2, which merely gauges the amount

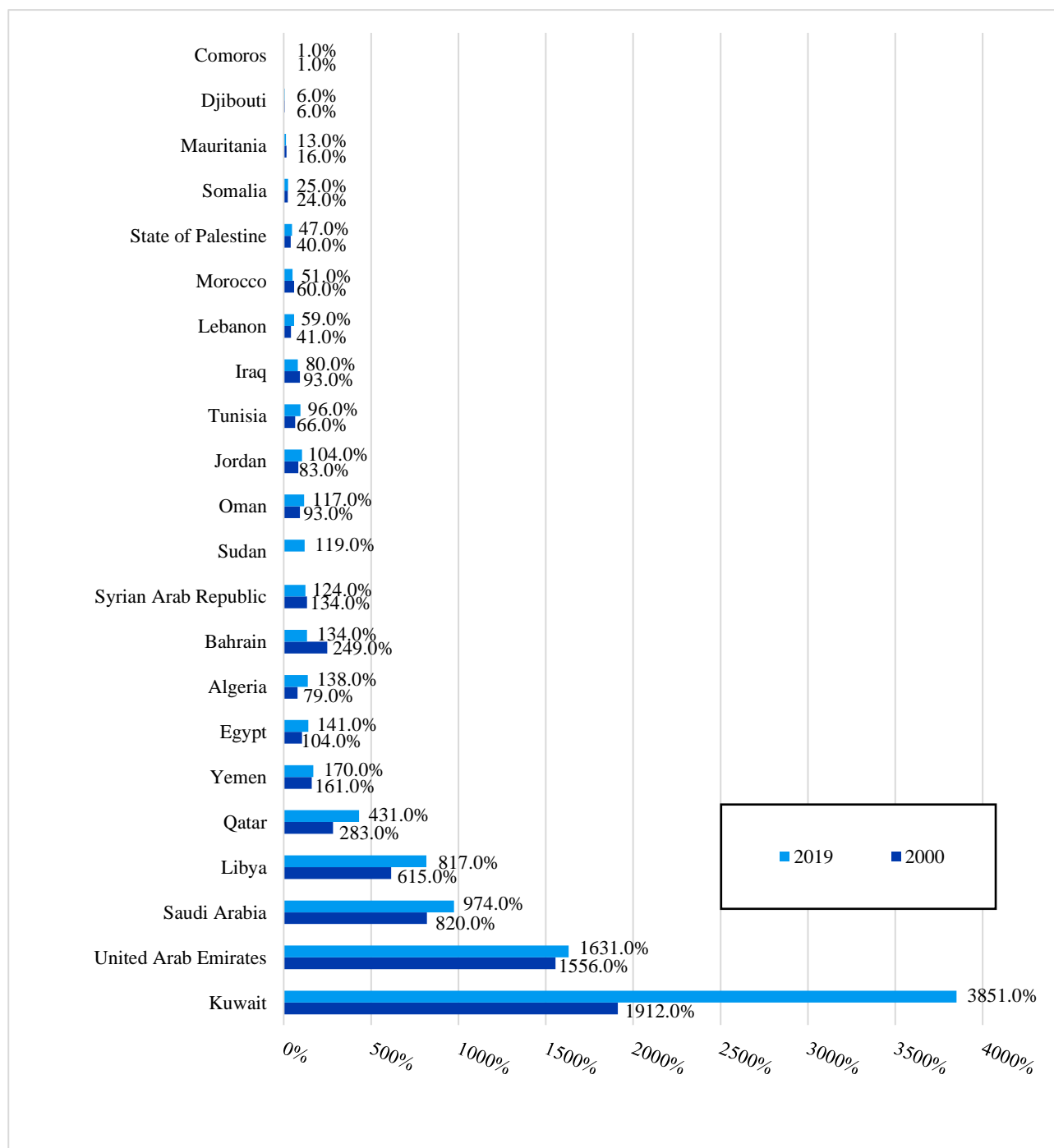
⁶ [SDG Indicators](#).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

extracted. This demonstrates both a lack of access to freshwater resources and a lack of investment in sufficient infrastructure in the State of Palestine, primarily due to the limitations and damage resulting from military operations.⁹

Figure 4. SDG indicator 6.4.2 (Percentage)



Source: SDG 6 Data Portal.

⁹ ESCWA, *Moving towards Water Security in the Arab Region*, 2019.

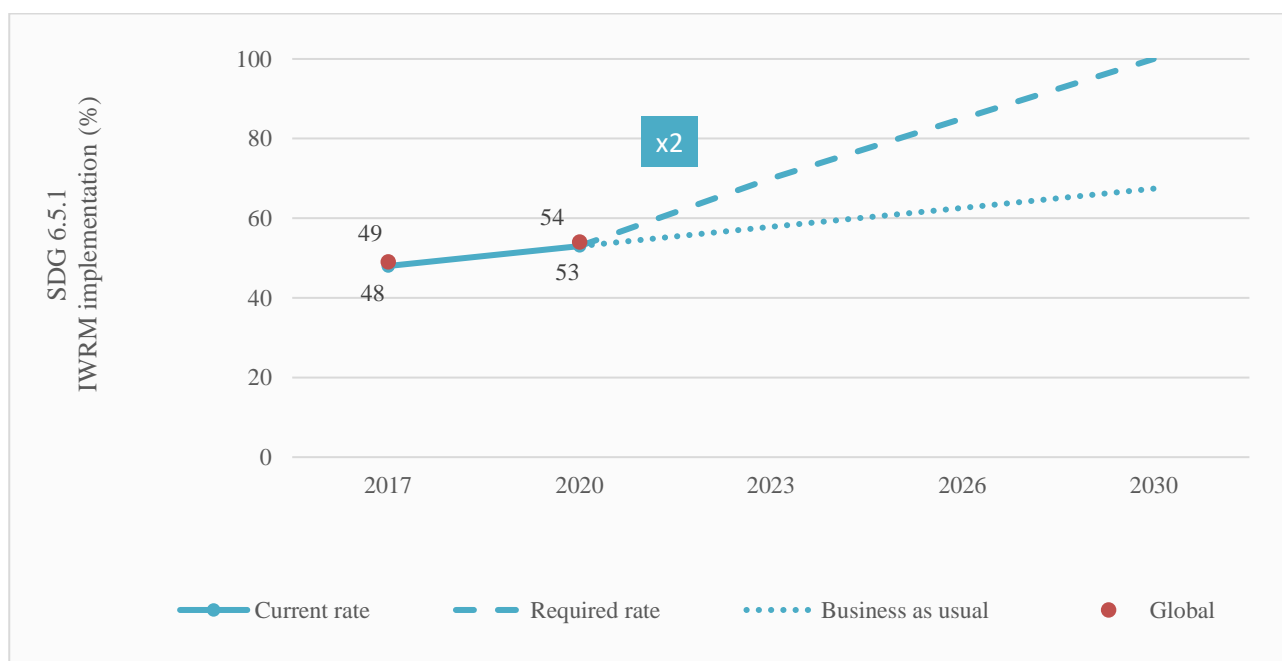
E. SDG target 6.5: By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate

1. *SDG indicator 6.5.1: Degree of integrated water resources management*

20. Integrated water resources management (IWRM) implementation is based on an internationally agreed definition, officially established in 1992. IWRM is defined as a process that promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources to maximize economic and social welfare in an equitable manner, without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.¹⁰ The indicator score is calculated from a country survey with 33 questions, with each question scored on a scale of 0 to 100.¹¹

21. The average degree of integrated water resources management increased from 48 to 53 per cent for the Arab region from 2017 to 2020. Nevertheless, considerable improvements remain to meet SDG target 6.5 on implementing integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, by 2030.

Figure 5. Arab region's rate of IWRM implementation



Source: ESCWA, 2021 Status Report on the Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management in the Arab Region, 2021.

2. *SDG indicator 6.5.2: Proportion of transboundary basin area with an operational arrangement for water cooperation*

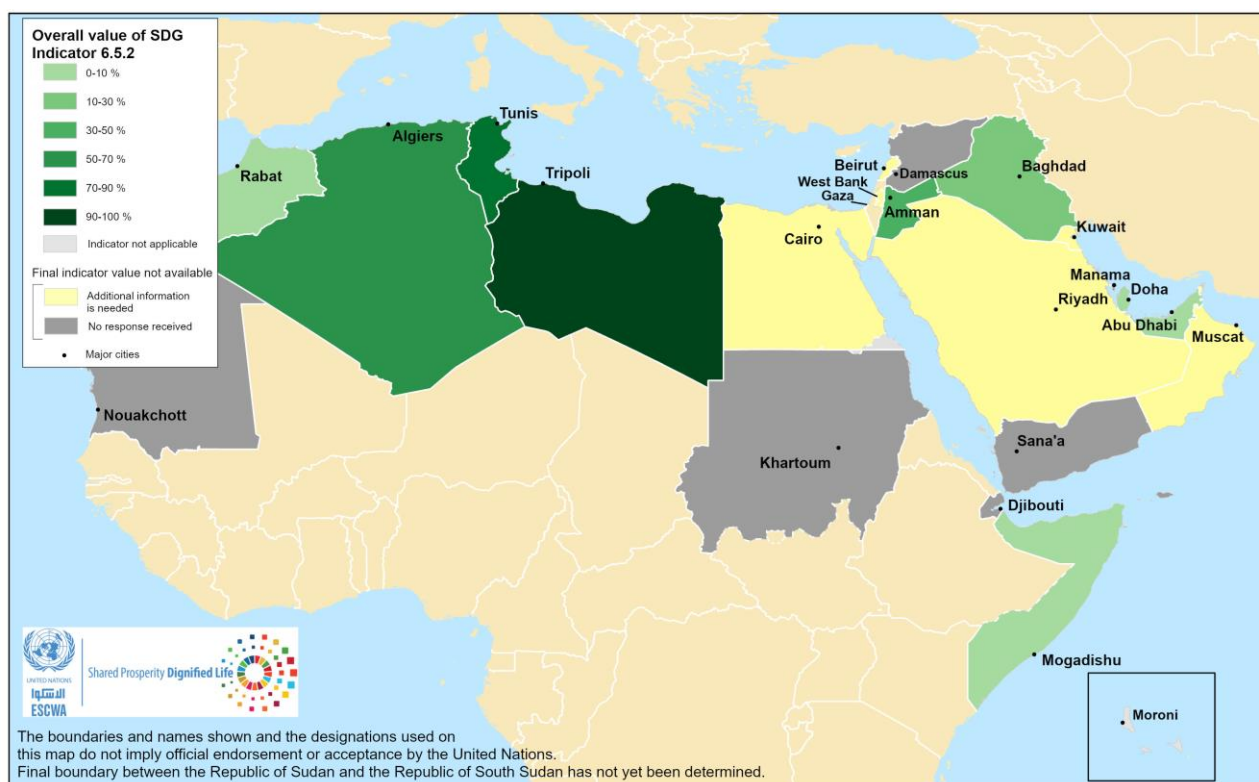
22. A “transboundary basin” refers to a river or lake basin or an aquifer system that marks, crosses or is located on boundaries between two or more States. A basin comprises the entire catchment area of a surface water body or the area of the aquifer for groundwater. “Arrangement for water cooperation” refers to a bilateral or multilateral treaty, convention, agreement or other formal arrangement. “Operational” means that an agreement for cooperation between countries sharing transboundary basins meets all the following criteria: there is a joint body or mechanism for transboundary cooperation; there are regular and formal communications

¹⁰ Global Water Partnership, [What is IWRM?](#), 2011.

¹¹ [SDG Indicators](#).

between riparian countries in the form of meetings; there is a joint or coordinated water management plan(s), or joint objectives have been set; and there is a regular exchange of data and information.¹²

Figure 6. Overall value of SDG indicator 6.5.2 in the Arab region, 2020



Source: ESCWA, [Transboundary cooperation in Arab States: Second regional report on SDG indicator 6.5.2](#), 2021.

23. A total of 21 of the 22 Arab countries share transboundary rivers, lakes or aquifers. For the most recent reporting exercise, 15 of them submitted responses on SDG indicator 6.5.2. As at 2020, only Egypt has 100 per cent of its transboundary river and lake basin areas covered by operational arrangements, followed by Lebanon (76 per cent of basin areas covered) and Jordan (62 per cent of basin areas covered). Of the 21 Arab countries sharing transboundary aquifers, three (Algeria, Libya and Tunisia) have operational arrangements covering 50 per cent or more of their transboundary aquifer areas. Furthermore, considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.5 on implementing integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation, by 2030.¹³

F. SDG target 6.6: By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers, and lakes

24. SDG indicator 6.6.1 monitors water-related ecosystems and how they have been changing over time. It tracks changes in the following four components of freshwater ecosystems: spatial area, water quality, water quantity, and the health of ecosystems. The indicator utilizes geographic information system (GIS) data. For brevity, only permanent water area change will be reviewed in the present document.¹⁴

¹² Ibid.

¹³ ESCWA, [Transboundary cooperation in Arab States: Second regional report on SDG indicator 6.5.2](#), 2021.

¹⁴ [SDG Indicators](#).

25. The simple arithmetic mean of the portion of lakes' and rivers' permanent water area change increased by 20 per cent in the Arab region in the period 2015-2019. Furthermore, considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.6 on protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

G. SDG target 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

26. Water- and sanitation-related official development assistance (ODA) is part of government-coordinated spending plans, defined as the total water- and sanitation-related ODA disbursements included in the government budget. Water- and sanitation-related activities and programmes include those for water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (SDG targets 6.1 and 6.2); wastewater and water quality (SDG target 6.3); water efficiency (SDG target 6.4), water resource management (SDG target 6.5); and water-related ecosystems (SDG target 6.6). SDG target 6.a includes activities and programmes for water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling, and reuse technologies.¹⁵

27. The Arab region received 18.1 per cent of total global ODA for the water and sanitation sector in 2021, equivalent to less than 0.01 per cent of the region's GDP. For the same year, the average Arab country received 0.8 per cent of total global ODA to the sector, compared with a global average of 0.6 per cent. Furthermore, if Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are dropped from this group, the average Arab country received only 0.3 per cent. Consequently, ODA for the water and sanitation sector is insufficient. Moreover, considerable improvements are needed to meet SDG target 6.a on expanding 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, by 2030.

H. SDG target 6.b: Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management

28. The indicator assesses local administrative units (as defined by the national Government) that have an established and operational mechanism by which individuals and communities can meaningfully contribute to decisions and directions concerning water and sanitation management.¹⁶

29. Of the 12 Arab countries reporting on laws and policies, only five had laws "not clearly defined" on drinking water and sanitation services. In terms of participation, 11 countries report thereon. Communities and users participating in planning programmes for drinking water had high levels of engagement across the Arab region. Nevertheless, considerable improvements remain to meet SDG target 6.b on supporting and strengthening the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

II. Beyond SDG 6

30. Safe and affordable water and sanitation play a critical role in sustainable development, as they impact a broad range of issues and sectors, such as health, agriculture, food security, climate change, economics and finance. The following section will highlight some of these critical interconnections with water and sanitation.

¹⁵ [SDG Indicators](#).

¹⁶ Ibid.

A. Health

31. SDG 6 aims to ensure the availability and sustainable management of drinking water and sanitation for all. Health is intrinsically linked to SDG 6. Access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation services is the solution to combatting water-related illnesses, such as Escherichia Coli (E. Coli), cholera and diarrhoea. In addition to water-related illnesses, access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation services improves handwashing outcomes and effectiveness, which is integral to combatting numerous other illnesses, including COVID-19. Therefore, achieving SDG 6 is essential to promoting good health and well-being.

SDG indicator 3.9.2: Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene

32. A country's per capita income and proportion of safely managed WASH are highly correlated with the mortality rate owing to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation, and lack of hygiene. Most notably, the data indicates that significant progress is required in Arab least developed countries (LDCs) to achieve the water-related factors of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs. Overall, significant improvements are needed to meet SDG target 3.9 on substantially reducing the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water, and soil pollution and contamination by 2030.

Table 4. SDG indicator 3.9.2 (Deaths per 100,000 population)

Country	2019
LDCs	
Comoros	43.8
Djibouti	37.6
Mauritania	37.8
Somalia	99.2
Sudan	15.8
Yemen	15.6
Mashreq	
Egypt	4.8
Iraq	4.4
Jordan	1.9
Lebanon	2.4
Syrian Arab Republic	9.1
Maghreb	
Algeria	4.1
Libya	2.2
Morocco	4.6
Tunisia	3.1
GCC	
Bahrain	0.8
Kuwait	0.8
Oman	1.6
Qatar	0.4
Saudi Arabia	1.9
United Arab Emirates	0.8

Source: WHO Global Health Observatory.

B. Agriculture and food security

33. Access to safe and affordable water and sanitation services leads to increased food security and more sustainable agriculture, which in turn improves access and affordability of water and sanitation. Greater wastewater collection, treatment and reuse levels are the linchpin to an improved food security-agriculture-sanitation nexus. Using this alternative source of irrigation water decreases freshwater withdrawal, increases agricultural yields, and/or potentially reduces the required quantity of fertilizer. Consequently, increased wastewater reuse results in increased water and food security.

34. Similarly, wastewater reuse in fisheries can serve as a cost-lowering tool, while protecting local water sources from overexploitation. Health and food security is also integrally connected to safe and affordable water services. Without adequate water services, people are unable to clean potentially harmful contaminants from their produce. Good water management practices and systems for both agricultural and domestic use therefore lead to more sustainable water resources, increased food security, and improved health outcomes.

C. Climate change

35. Climate change has a significant impact on SDG 6. Increased variability of temperatures and precipitation leads to more frequent and intense droughts, floods and sea level rise, thus making water resources more uncertain. These changes necessitate new adaptation approaches to water resource management so as to prevent water shortages, protect ecosystems, and limit the impact of floods and other water-related disasters. SDG 6 aims to ensure that all people have access to sufficient and safe water by 2030, which will be difficult to achieve without actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

D. Economics and finance

36. Economics, finance and SDG 6 are closely interlinked. Leveraging economic principles is essential to incentivizing companies and other stakeholders to invest in infrastructure and improve water use efficiency to achieve SDG 6 by 2030. Furthermore, financing is also needed to monitor progress on SDG 6. Many countries have attributed delays in rolling out SDG monitoring exercises to financial constraints.

37. Closely related to economics and SDG 6 is finance. Finance needs to be better utilized to fund development projects that aim to improve access to water and sanitation, including the expansion of private sector engagement in the water sector. Moreover, the Arab region may wish to increase the implementation of innovative financial instruments, which can be an effective tool to finance projects that improve access to water and sanitation for those living in poverty.

III. The invisible picture: missing SDG data in the Arab region

A. Overview of missing SDG data in the Arab region

38. Missing data can significantly impact the achievement of SDG 6, thus affecting the Arab region's ability to accurately measure, evaluate and inform decision-making related to water and sanitation policies. It is difficult to assess progress toward SDG 6 without accurate data. Without understanding the baseline situation, the efforts of all actors involved in water and sanitation will remain inadequate. Therefore, more comprehensive and detailed data must be collected and used to monitor progress toward SDG 6.

B. Thematic data gaps

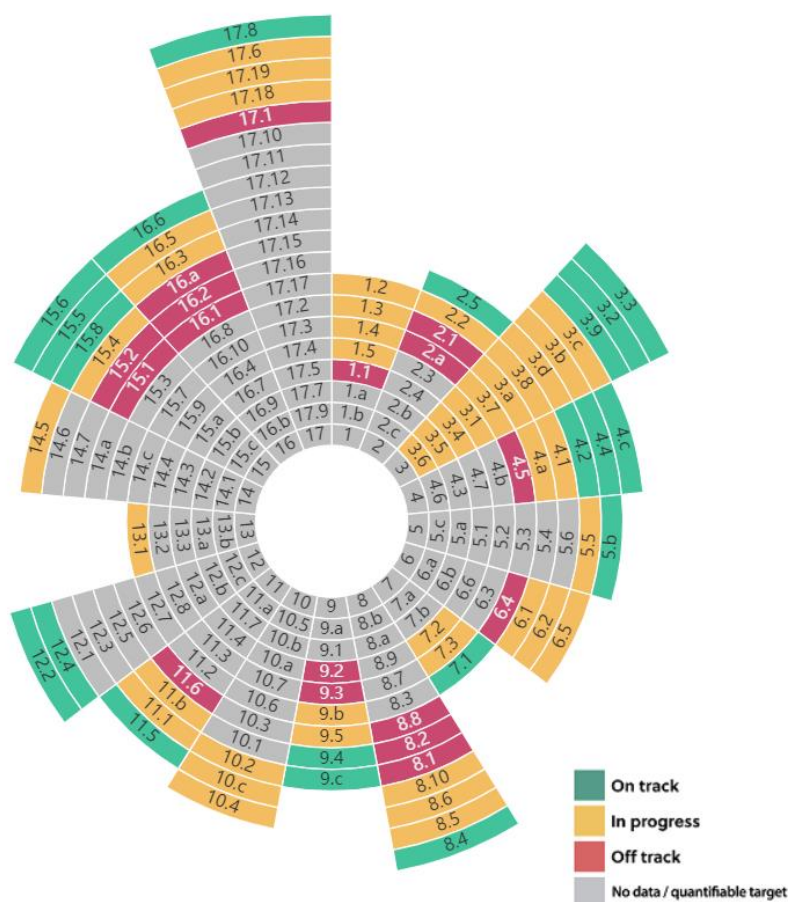
39. One case of a thematic data gap relates to SDG indicator 6.5.2. Only 9 of the 22 Arab countries have complete data for this SDG indicator. In the last reporting cycle, six countries provided insufficient information

to report on the indicator.¹⁷ Another case of a thematic data gap is SDG indicator 6.3.2, on which only 6 of the 22 Arab countries have ever reported, and only two in the past five years.

40. A variety of reasons can systematically explain this lack of data. Some indicators have less precise methodologies, resulting in a more significant reporting burden for member States. Other factors may be related to the sensitivity of some data. Many of these issues have been addressed specifically for the Arab region. Several initiatives by ESCWA and other United Nations entities in the region have recently addressed improving data availability.

41. As seen in figure 7, there are considerable data gaps in the Arab region. Regarding SDG 6, the most noticeable data gaps are for targets 6.3, 6.6, 6.a and 6.b. Better and more frequent data are essential to achieving SDG 6 and the 2030 Agenda overall.

Figure 7. Arab SDG Monitor: regional progress by target



Source: Arab SDG Monitor.

C. SDGs from an Arab perspective

42. The SDGs were created to mobilize collective global action to achieve an inclusive, equitable and sustainable future for all. SDG 6, in particular, focuses on ensuring access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all. This Goal and its many elements are especially relevant to Arab countries, and can only be achieved through adaptation by applying an Arab perspective. For instance, many Arab countries face water

¹⁷ ESCWA, *Transboundary cooperation in Arab States: Second regional report on SDG indicator 6.5.2*, 2021.

scarcity, leading to significant challenges in access to and affordability of drinking water and sanitation services.

43. Water and sanitation challenges in the region require an integrated approach that improves access to water and sanitation services and increases their efficiency, so as to ensure that all people in the Arab region have access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation services. Achieving SDG 6 in the region necessitates concerted regional efforts that include all ESCWA member States. The Arab region must focus on increasing access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation services, while adopting sustainable water management and efficient water-use practices. These challenges should therefore be embraced and seen as an opportunity to develop innovative strategies to address water and sanitation challenges, resulting in the region achieving the SDGs in line with its needs and specificities.

IV. Topics for discussion

44. The round-table discussion aims to identify priorities for the Arab region in the coming years aimed at accelerating the achievement of the water-related SDGs, and to guide collective work at the regional level and the work of the ESCWA secretariat.

45. All the above-mentioned topics can be discussed, with a focus on the following:

(a) Particular challenges faced by Arab countries in achieving water-related SDGs and the means to overcome them;

(b) Specific regional water-related priorities that are not captured by current targets or indicators, but are important for advancing water security in the region;

(c) Proposals for future work in that regard by the ESCWA secretariat.
