ANNUAL SDG REVIEW 2022

Shared Prosperity **Dignified Life**

VISION
ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

MISSION
Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice.
Together, we work for a sustainable future for all.

ANNUAL SDG
REVIEW 2022

United Nations
Beirut

Contents

List of figures

List of boxes

Building back better from COVID-19 while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region

About the Annual SDG Review

The Annual SDG Review series is meant to inform and trigger discussions at the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. Issued yearly ahead of the Forum, it provides:

A statistical check-in on where the Arab region stands in terms of realizing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

A reading of the Forum's theme in relation to the 2030 Agenda as a whole.

The 2022 edition is the first in the series. Feedback is welcome to escwa-2030agenda@un.org.

Almost two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Arab countries are recovering, albeit at different paces.

Despite diminishing fiscal space and other constraints, they have deployed stimulus packages of varying sizes and adopted policy response measures to safeguard livelihoods and revitalize economies.

Innovative approaches have emerged in the region that deserve to be institutionalized and scaled up going forward.

Yet, on the eve of the pandemic, the Arab countries were not on track to achieve the SDGs, which made them ill-prepared to face the crisis. Explore the data on the Arab region's progress on achieving the SDGs.

On-track
In progress
Off-track
No data

33 SDG targets out of 169 are on track
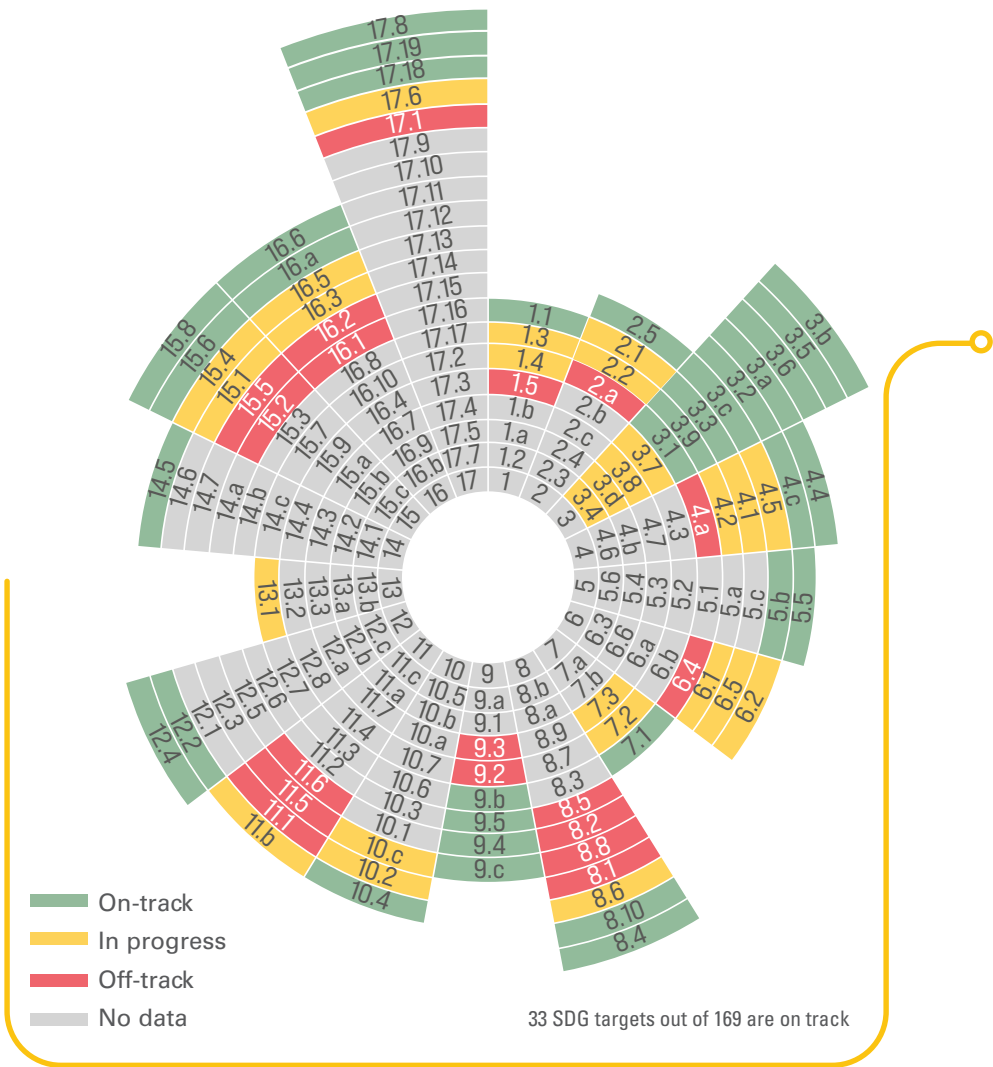
Better how?
Better for whom?

Building back better from the COVID-19 crisis is in fact about changing the existing structures and conditions that led to the crisis and amplified its impacts. It is about aligning closer with the SDGs and the spirit of the 2030 Agenda. It is also about keeping sight of the megatrends and leveraging regional cooperation and integration.

This Annual SDG Review focuses on three regional priorities.

1

The **social protection chapter** shows that **better means inclusive of all**, especially of those who are the most left behind. The expansion of social safety nets in response to the crisis offers a chance to construct stronger, shock-responsive social protection systems that provide whole-of-life coverage and resilience against future crises. Read more.

2

The **green economic recovery chapter** shows that **better means greener**. Investments to lift Arab economies out of recession are opportunities to decarbonize, diversify, create decent jobs and enhance resilience. Read more.

3

The **digital transformation chapter** shows that **better means transforming the way things are done.** The digitalization of business, government services, education and health in response to the crisis was fast, offering great potential in terms of inclusion, economic diversification and resilience. Read more.

Key takeaway messages

Social protection

What Arab countries did:

The crisis pushed governments to find ways to reach many who had previously been excluded from social safety nets, and highlighted the need for – as well as the feasibility of – universal, shock-responsive, whole-of-life coverage that leaves no one behind.

What Arab countries can do:

Arab governments can enhance social protection systems by rationalizing programmes through broad coordination efforts, investing in administrative improvements such as integrated beneficiary registries, and focusing on the financial sustainability of safety nets.

Regional cooperation:

Regional action can help Arab countries overcome long-term challenges related to the coverage of migrants, financing and reforming social protection systems.

Green economic recovery

What Arab countries did:

There is little information on the environmental implications of the stimulus packages introduced by Arab governments to reinvigorate the economy. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they are likely to be negative or mixed (neutral at best).

What Arab countries can do:

Economic planning must maintain pre-pandemic momentum, seek to increase the share of green projects and embark on the systemic change needed to support a true green recovery.

Regional cooperation:

Arab countries further regional cooperation on transboundary environmental problems through formulating or strengthening regional normative frameworks, and identifying and implementing strategic initiatives on shared environmental priorities to build regional resilience.

Digital transformation

What Arab countries did:

The region witnessed a positive surge in the acceptance and practice of digital ways of doing business, learning, seeking medical help and accessing various government services, offering prospects for improving the resilience of Arab societies.

What Arab countries can do:

To capture the full value of digital transformation and prevent the deepening or creation of new divides, Arab countries need to address pre-existing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

Regional cooperation:

Arab countries could establish a regional alliance to foster the collaborative development of digital public goods.

Social protection

INCREASING BENEFITS AND THEIR REACH

SOCIAL PROTECTION

ADMINISTERING SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS

The pandemic highlighted pre-existing weaknesses in social protection systems in the Arab region, but spurred a new mobilization of resources to extend social safety nets in response to the crisis. Arab countries have an opportunity to learn from this experience to construct stronger, shock-responsive social protection systems that provide whole-of-life coverage and resilience against future crises.

Directly related goals:

1 NO POVERTY

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

5 GENDER EQUALITY

8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

1 Building back better through social protection

Countries in the Arab region responded rapidly to the economic repercussions that the crisis had on individuals and households through measures such as cash transfers, wage subsidies, utility waivers and price controls on staple goods. While many of these interventions were limited in scope and duration and will not become permanent components of the region's social protection systems, government responses to the crisis acknowledged the need to help those left behind by existing programmes. Shock-responsive expansions of support systems, innovative delivery mechanisms, efforts to improve social registries and the acceleration of long-term reform projects could result in durable improvements to social protection systems and advance progress on the 2030 Agenda.

> **Social protection is defined as a set of public policies and programmes intended to ensure an adequate standard of living and access to health care throughout the life cycle. Social protection benefits can be provided in cash or in kind through universal or targeted non-contributory schemes, contributory schemes such as pensions, and complementary measures serving to build human capital, create productive assets and facilitate access to employment.**

A. Increasing benefits and their reach

1. What has been done

Arab countries frequently employed existing social protection infrastructure to scale up programmes in response to the crisis, either by increasing the benefits sent to recipients, or by increasing the number of beneficiaries, strategies respectively known as vertical and horizontal expansion. While many measures were temporary, some countries accelerated reform processes, made permanent changes to existing programmes, or introduced new components to their social protection systems.

Temporary expansion measures targeting women, families with children, older persons, persons with disabilities, workers left unemployed by the crisis and other vulnerable groups were introduced throughout the region:

- Informal sector workers were made temporarily eligible for cash and in-kind benefits in many countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, State of Palestine and the Sudan. In some cases, horizontal expansions targeted workers from particular sectors – examples were seen in Bahrain, the Comoros, Mauritania, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.[1]

- Workers under self-isolation and quarantine orders were given temporary income protection in Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.[2]

- One-off top-up payments enhanced cash transfer benefits in Iraq and Jordan, and annual Ramadan payments to disadvantaged households were increased in Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia.[3]

- With international assistance, Somalia was able to scale up its Baxnaano national safety net programme to reach more than 200,000 households.[4]

- Temporary programmes targeting specific vulnerable groups were launched throughout the region, including in Iraq, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia.[5]

- Temporary health-care guarantees were launched in many countries in the region. In Morocco and Tunisia, insurance coverage was maintained for those who otherwise would have become ineligible due to job loss. In Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, COVID-19-related health coverage was extended to all residents, including expatriate workers.[6]

The crisis also drove forward-looking, permanent reforms of social protection regimes, and led policy makers to accelerate the launch of new programmes. Examples include:

- The Takaful and Karama cash transfer programme in Egypt underwent a significant expansion. Coverage was extended to an additional 411,000 families, with most direct beneficiaries being women.[7] This expansion was complemented by pilots of the new FORSA programme to connect Takaful and Karama beneficiaries with economic opportunities and facilitate their sustainable graduation from the programme.[8]

- In the State of Palestine, 10,000 new beneficiaries were moved from the waiting list into the National Cash Transfer Programme.[9]

- Pension benefits were permanently increased in some countries. After offering a one-off benefit payment to pensioners, the retirement pension programme in Tunisia was permanently revised to set an income floor of 180 Tunisian Dinars per month.[10] In Egypt, pension benefits were increased by 14 per cent.[11]

- Countries also made changes to wage and tax policy, including an increase in the minimum wage in Algeria, and the creation of new tax brackets in Algeria and Egypt.[12]

- The cabinet of Iraq approved a draft pension and social security law aiming to provide private sector workers with the same benefits as their public sector counterparts.[13]

- In Oman, the government inaugurated a new unemployment insurance scheme. Under the contributory programme, Omani workers in both the private and public sectors will be eligible for up to six months of support amounting to 60 per cent of their insured salary, or the amount of the minimum pension provided by the social security law. Due to the pandemic, the eligibility requirement to be affiliated with the scheme for 12 consecutive months was waived, allowing affected workers to benefit immediately from the new insurance regime.[14]

- In Morocco, the government unveiled an overhaul of the country's social protection system. Central to this plan is a reform and expansion of health coverage, which will see beneficiaries of its targeted medical assistance

programme (RAMED) transferred to a newly broadened compulsory health insurance scheme. Further expansions targeting informal workers and formal workers currently excluded from the scheme are to be undertaken in the coming years. Under the plan, the compulsory health insurance scheme in Morocco will cover nearly 22 million new adherents.[15]

19 countries in the region

utilized cash transfer programmes in response to the pandemic

At least **24 social protection measures** adopted by Arab States during the pandemic were made **permanent**

Source: IPCIG, "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South: Online Dashboard", 2021 (accessed on 15 September 2021).

2. What countries can do moving forward

As countries pursue reforms seeking to replace universal food and energy subsidies with targeted programmes serving the poorest households, attention must be paid to the "missing middle" who are insufficiently poor to qualify for targeted assistance programmes and are often either excluded from contributory social insurance schemes, or unlikely to sign up in cases where optional enrolment has been made possible.[16]

Those most excluded from social protection systems include informal and agricultural workers, members of the liberal professions (such as lawyers, doctors and independent contractors), the unemployed and youth not in education, employment, or training. Further, migrant workers and refugees, persons with disabilities, older persons, the ultra-poor and persons engaged in unpaid work (who are disproportionately women) are frequently left out of the region's social protection systems.[17]

Coverage gaps are largely consequences of exclusionary contributory insurance schemes, fragmented and insufficient social assistance programmes, and underinvestment in social protection.

To implement a recovery that **leaves no one behind**, Arab countries must find ways to fill in these gaps to fulfil the right to social protection for all. Avenues for action include:

• Instituting universal human rights and inclusion as guiding principles of reform.

• Establishing and enforcing universal social protection floors that alleviate

poverty, vulnerability and exclusion by providing access to essential health care and basic income security to all.

- Adopting a whole-of-life approach to social protection that includes programmes that reach individuals at all stages of life and respond to individual needs at junctures from birth through old age.
- Devising ways to incorporate informal workers and other excluded groups

into contributory and non-contributory social protection schemes.[18]

- Prioritizing the sustainable funding of social protection systems.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the Arab region is far behind the world average for the coverage of many vulnerable groups. Similarly, investment in social protection remains low compared to other regions, as demonstrated in figure 2.

Figure 1. Social protection coverage of select groups, 2020 (percentage)
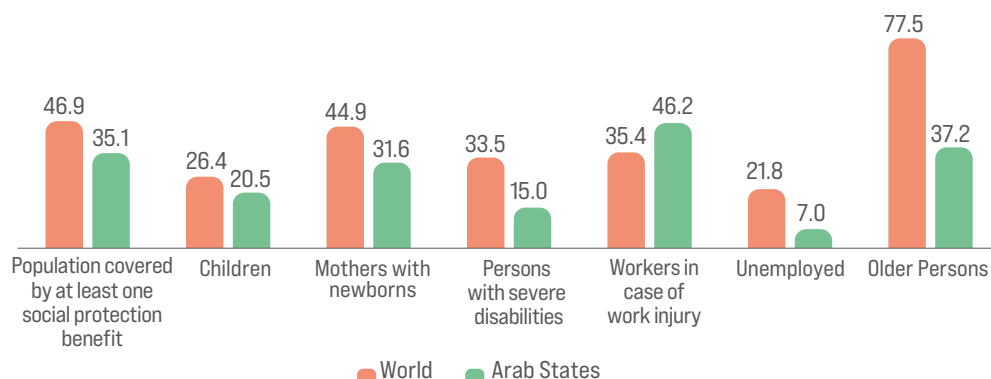
Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), "SDG indicator 1.3.1 – Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems", ILOSTAT database. Available at: https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/social-protection/ (accessed on 19 January 2021).

Figure 2. Public non-health social protection expenditure, select regions (percentage of GDP).
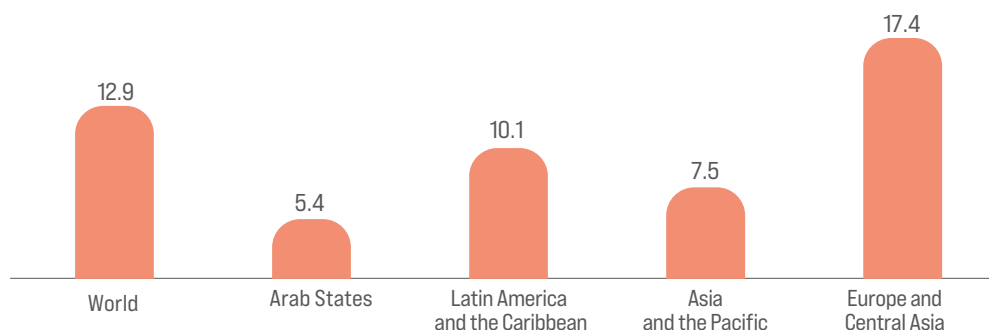
Source: ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social protection at the crossroads – in pursuit of a better future* (International Labour Office –, ILO, 2021). Estimate for Arab States calculated using the data within the report, including all States that are members of the Arab league for which expenditure data was available. The most recent gross domestic product (GDP) data (as reported by the World Bank) were used for calculating, with a cut-off date of 2018.

B. Administering social protection systems

1. What has been done

Arab States deployed technology and demonstrated flexibility in their social protection responses to the crisis. These adaptations have the potential to permanently impact the administration of social protection systems in the region and transform how people access benefits.

In much of the region, technology-based platforms and Internet applications became important parts of the user interface of social protection programmes:

- Online platforms connected potential beneficiaries to assistance programmes in countries including Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia.[19]

- In Kuwait, call lines, text messages and WhatsApp were used to allow individuals to register for and check the status of payments.[20] In Egypt, social media platforms including WhatsApp were used to distribute information about benefits and eligibility criteria. In the State of Palestine, informal workers eligible for assistance were contacted through text message.[21]

- Mobile applications were employed to allow users to apply for benefits, as in Saudi Arabia.[22]

In some cases, the COVID-19 pandemic led policymakers to accelerate efforts to improve the administrative capacity of social protection systems:

- World Bank programmes in the Comoros[23] and Lebanon[24] included measures to develop national social registries for collecting information on potential programme beneficiaries.

- In the State of Palestine, the National Cash Transfer Programme's Management Information System was used to identify priority recipients of funds, and efforts were launched to enhance the system through a questionnaire and registration drive, and by soliciting information on vulnerability from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and relief organizations.[25]

- In other countries, efforts were made to connect information from disparate sources such as civil registries and tax office records to better reach beneficiaries. In Egypt, for example, the "G to G" initiative facilitated the cross-checking of beneficiary databases to support inter-governmental coordination.[26] In Jordan, the National Unified Registry has continued to link data from a growing list of government institutions, including the National Aid Fund.[27]

- Ongoing efforts to reform social registries continued during the crisis. For example, Morocco adopted the *Registre social unique*, which will collect socio-economic data to determine eligibility for an array of social assistance programmes.[28]

Delivery mechanisms were also adapted to the exigencies of the crisis:

- In many cases, benefits were deposited electronically to recipients' existing bank accounts. In the Sudan, accounts were created for recipients to receive benefits that could be collected at ATMs.[29]

- In the Syrian Arab Republic, beneficiaries were able to access allotments of food

subsidies through electronic cards issued to distribute aid.[30]

- In several countries, benefits were distributed through digital wallets accessible via mobile phones. Tunisia launched a new digital wallet to allow benefit recipients to receive payments on their mobile phones, with plans to increase the utilization of this tool for future benefit payments.[31]

- In some countries, such as Algeria and Morocco, beneficiaries of select programmes could appoint proxies to collect benefits on their behalf.[32]

- The number of payment pick-up points for non-digitally delivered benefits was increased in many countries.

- In some cases, school lunch programmes were modified to continue serving families, such as through door-to-door delivery of meals (as in Libya) or by allowing rations to be picked up for home use (as in Yemen).

- Countries also leveraged charities, civil society groups and other non-State actors to implement social protection interventions. In Mauritania, labour unions were provided with food and disinfectants to distribute to their members' families.[33] Charities assisted in distributing benefits and identifying recipients in countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.[34]

2. What countries can do moving forward

- Extend efforts to reform universal subsidy programmes in favour of more progressive social assistance measures.

- Adopt an integrated systems approach: review the component programmes of social protection systems to ensure internal coherence and maximize their efficiency.

- Ensure full consideration of linkages between social protection and other policy areas, including labour market, education, economic and fiscal policies. For example, social protection systems can be linked with active labour market policies to assist beneficiaries in finding jobs and facilitate a process of "graduation" for recipients to obtain sustainable decent livelihoods.[35]

- Create institutionalized coordination mechanisms, such as inter-ministerial committees and technical working groups to conduct rationalization reviews. Some countries in the region, including Morocco and Mauritania, have already employed this approach.[36]

- Increase digital and data capacities and develop integrated beneficiary registries with quality, up-to-date information that can be used for multiple programmes. Such registries might be enhanced through systems that draw on other administrative databases and can advance efforts to reach excluded groups and minimize targeting errors. By facilitating identification of potential recipients, such databases can allow governments to rapidly scale-up assistance during an economic downturn.[37]

- Ensure that reform processes incorporate social dialogues that are inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders, notably marginalized groups, informal workers and civil society organizations.[38]

- Prioritize the financial sustainability of social protection systems and

Box 1. Gender just social protection

Women are at particular risk of being left out of social protection systems in the Arab region, even as they disproportionately bear the consequences of socio-economic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The following trends have been observed in the Arab region:

- Women are often left uncovered by contributory social insurance schemes. At 20.5 per cent, women's labour force participation in the Arab region is the lowest in the world. As in other regions, women in Arab countries are more likely than men to carry out unpaid work, including childcare, cooking and household chores. Further, women are more likely than men to work in vulnerable employment and in the informal sector.

- In many countries, considerable gaps have been observed in coverage by select social protection systems – in what the ILO refers to as the Arab States region, men are more than 4 times as likely to be covered by comprehensive social security systems, and in some countries, men are more than 5 times as likely to receive a pension than women.

- The Arab region has relatively low benefits coverage for mothers with newborns. At 31.6 per cent coverage, Arab countries are below the lower-middle income average of 33.3 per cent, and behind the global average of 44.9 per cent.

define funding sources in legislation. The financial sustainability of social protection systems can benefit from improved integration with national revenue plans and with tax, budgeting, Zakat funding and economic diversification policies.

C. What to watch for

- **Aging population structures** and an increasing incidence of chronic diseases across the Arab region will add additional stress to health and social protection systems. Further, long-term demographic transitions will disrupt the region's dependency ratio, with important implications for countries' tax bases and ability to finance social protection systems. In the shorter term, however, countries in the region must benefit from demographic dividends.

- The rise of the **gig-economy** risks leaving many workers unprotected by existing labour regulations and social protection systems; labour market regulations and social protection policies are potential tools to reduce the precarity that often plagues these workers.

- The increased prevalence of **digital technology**, including artificial intelligence, can offer opportunities to increase productivity, but presents risks for those in jobs faced with automation, and may require governments to devise ways to retrain affected workers and provide them with income security.

- Increased **digitalization of social protection systems** raises ethical and legal questions on data protection, digital equality, accountability and human rights. Social protection systems must remain human-centred, and special

efforts are warranted to ensure that digitalization does not leave behind those who are digitally illiterate or otherwise lack Internet access.

- **Political instability and conflict** threaten to increase the number of refugees and internally displaced persons and disrupt social protection systems in the region, increasing the number of vulnerable people while hindering the functionality of protection systems. By contrast, strong social protection can serve as a tool to strengthen social cohesion and build trust in institutions.[39]

- Increased **international mobility and migration** risk leaving many uncovered by current social protection systems and necessitate agreements on portability of benefits and other means to make access to benefits available to migrants.

- Low levels of revenue generation and **increasing debt loads** can limit the fiscal space available to finance inclusive social protection systems.

D. Regional cooperation and integration

On migration: As of 2019, the Arab region hosted more than 40 million migrants and refugees, representing around 15 per cent of the global total.[40] Although humanitarian aid is often available for refugee populations, the long duration of their stays in host countries gives rise to other social protection needs, such as health insurance and old-age income security.[41] Non-refugee migrant workers in the region are also often unable to access social protection programmes, and were excluded from many emergency relief measures instituted during the pandemic. Regional and international strategies must be developed to ensure the continuity of protection across national borders. International frameworks such as the United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration can serve as useful guideposts for establishing non-discriminatory social protection systems and portability of benefits across borders.[42]

On financing: Many countries in the region – particularly the least developed countries (LDCs) and crisis-afflicted countries – fall far short of the resource requirements needed to establish effective social protection floors. Arab States could work together to make social protection an impactful focal point for international financial mobilization, potentially by establishing a regional fund for social protection to guarantee a basic standard of living for everyone in the region.[43]

On capacity-building and technical cooperation: International development partnerships can maximize their impact by responding to the long-term needs of beneficiary countries, and where possible working to enhance governments' capacities to deliver social protection to their populations, for example, through the development of social registries. Technical cooperation initiatives, including the Expert Group on Social Protection Reform managed by ESCWA, can offer valuable platforms for information exchange. Further, regional fora such as the Council of Arab Ministers for Social Affairs can serve as platforms to exchange regional best practices relating to the coverage, shock responsiveness, financing and governance of social protection systems.

11.5% of people in the region were below the international poverty line in 2019, with a significant increase from 8% in 2015

This figure is 35.1% in LDCs

> **We commit to assist migrant workers at all skills levels to have access to social protection in countries of destination and profit from the portability of applicable social security entitlements and earned benefits in their countries of origin or when they decide to take up work in another country.**
>
> United Nations Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (A/RES/73/195).

In 2020
2% of the region's population were refugees compared to 0.3% worldwide

25.8% of workers in the region were in vulnerable employment **(24.6% of men and 31.2% of women)**

Green economic recovery

ECONOMIC STIMULUS PACKAGES

GREEN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

DEVELOPMENT MEASURES FOR 2020 AND BEYOND

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an economic downturn with an uneven impact across the Arab region. It also offered an opportunity for a green recovery that could help lift Arab economies out of recession while decarbonizing, creating decent jobs, promoting equity, and enhancing community and infrastructure resilience.

The extent to which Arab countries have set a pathway for green recovery is not fully clear from the adopted stimulus measures. Will Arab countries seize this opportunity and what should they consider for the medium and long term?

Directly related goals:

2 Building back better through a green economic recovery

To counter the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and reinvigorate the economy, Arab governments have introduced economic stimulus packages of varying sizes, amounting in total to around 4 per cent of the regional GDP.[44] Whereas the immediate urgency of the pandemic may have temporarily diverted attention away from environmental priorities, and despite fiscal constraints, medium-term development plans formulated in the region in 2020 onwards have considered sustainability aspects. Building a better future post-COVID-19 entails supporting a green recovery through a range of systemic changes that will help avert future health, economic and environmental shocks.

> 66
>
> **We have a chance to not simply reset the world economy but to transform it… COVID-19 recovery and our planet's repair must be the two sides of the same coin.**
>
> Secretary-General, "The State of the Planet" speech given at Columbia University, 2 December 2020.

A. Economic stimulus packages

1. What has been done

Arab countries enacted various **measures to support businesses** stay afloat, including tax exemptions and reductions, waivers and reductions of government fees, rental subsidies, interest rate reductions, loans and interest deferment, and the extension of soft loans and credit support to increase liquidity.[45] A multitude of sectors were targeted including industry, tourism, transport, and to a lesser extent, agriculture and commerce. Examples include:

- Oman exempted companies that register during 2021 and 2022 in the economic diversification sectors from income tax for a period of five years.[46] These include "transformative industries, transportation and logistics, education, tourism, fisheries and mining".[47]

- Egypt announced the recapitalization of the Egyptian Textile holding company[48] and suspended tax on agricultural land for 2 years.[49]

- The United Arab Emirates extended reductions on the rental dues of airline offices and exemptions from the rentals of warehouse offices. Aviation support also included exemptions from parking and landing fees and operating fees.[50]

- The Comoros presented two grants of a total of 750 million Comorian Francs (some $1.7 million) to the vanilla sector and road transporters.[51]

Waivers and reductions on utility bills for water, gas and electricity constituted a common measure across the region, and were often time-bound, with few countries easing related environmental regulation. For example:

- Bahrain granted waivers on utility bills for water and electricity to individuals

and businesses and so did Mauritania for poor families[52] and Iraq for all citizens.[53]

- Jordan reinstated water meters to all subscribers with unsettled water bills of less than 300 Jordanian Dinars and stopped disconnecting those who fail to pay their dues.[54]

- Reductions on gas and electricity prices for the industrial sector were introduced in Egypt.[55]

- Exemptions on electricity and water bills for the hospitality, tourism and retails sectors and for commercial complexes and logistics zones were given in Qatar.[56]

- Reductions of almost 50 per cent were awarded on electricity bills for enterprises in the commercial, industrial and agricultural sectors in Saudi Arabia.[57]

- Tunisia postponed the collection of electricity and drinking water bills during the lockdown period with the possibility of settlement in instalments thereafter.[58]

- Subsidies on water and electricity for citizens and for the industrial and commercial sectors were provided in the United Arab Emirates.[59] The Sharjah Electricity, Water and Gas Authority cancelled the fines imposed on commercial and industrial enterprises for additional electricity loads.[60]

- Oman applied fixed tariffs for higher electricity consumers (more than 100,000 kilowatt-hours).[61]

2. What countries can do moving forward

There is little information on the environmental implications of the economic stimulus response to the COVID-19 crisis by Arab governments.

However, anecdotal evidence suggests that they are likely to be negative or mixed (neutral at best), encouraging the consumption of resources and benefiting sectors that have a high environmental footprint. Global assessments have shown that governments have generally not used COVID-19 stimulus packages to shift their economies towards greener trajectories.[62]

Going forward, Arab countries need to weigh their responses to COVID-19 against a comprehensive frame that balances the dimensions of sustainable development and avoids reversing environmental gains achieved to date. Arab governments could:

- Align stimulus packages with national 2030 Agenda and climate commitments. For example, rather than relaxing environmental regulations, **green conditionalities** could be attached to the financial support provided to polluting enterprises including emission reduction and renewable energy targets. Financial support could alternatively be channelled to environmentally sound products and industries.

- Promote the regular **disclosure of environmental information** by large enterprises that benefit from government stimulus funding to hold them accountable for their environmental stewardship and entice them to adopt production methods that are environmentally friendly. Environmental information disclosure can equally enhance and support public participation in environmental protection as it enables the public to monitor enterprise activities impacting the environment[63] and lobby policy makers as necessary.

- Continue efforts to **reform fossil fuel subsidies** and disincentivize carbon-intensive activities. Increasing taxation

on fossil fuels in line with their social costs will promote more efficient consumption and redirect investments to renewables, limiting emissions and supporting countries achieve their climate targets. The resulting savings and revenues should be used by governments to ensure a just transition to fossil fuel workers and equitable funding for public services.[64]

Fiscal support
by Arab Governments amounted to
3.9% of GDP and lagged far
behind the global average
of **23.3%**

Arab countries suffered greater
per capita GDP loss
over 2019-2020 compared
to the global average
(**7.8%** as opposed to **4.9%**)

The Arab region is the
**world's most fossil-fuel
dependent region** deriving more
than **95%** of its energy supply from
oil and natural gas

The Arab region is one of the world's
most water-stressed areas with an average
of 351 m³ of renewable water resources
per person in 2014
and **12 countries** facing absolute
water scarcity (below **500 m³**
per person per year)

Source: United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021); ESCWA, "Energy Vulnerability in the Arab Region", 2019; ESCWA, "Status Report on the Implementation of Integrated Water Resources Management in the Arab Region: Progress on SDG indicator 6.5.1.", 2019.

B. Development measures for 2020 and beyond with sustainability components

1. What has been done

Looking beyond immediate COVID-19 stimulus measures, it is clear that national development plans, voluntary national reviews of the 2030 Agenda and projects presented by Arab countries during 2020 and 2021 reflect actions to fulfil their **climate commitments** by increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix and enhancing energy efficiency, including through the promotion of

businesses/industries and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that adopt sustainable and clean production methods. Another clear focus is the shift to green buildings and sustainable transport, as well as "net zero" projects. Examples abound, for instance:

- The United Arab Emirates launched a plan to support the industrial sector to enhance sustainable and efficient production cycles and supply chains by implementing "industrial policies that reduce resource consumption, and support climate action and carbon neutrality efforts", among other initiatives.[65]

- Saudi Arabia signed a Declaration of Intent with Germany in March 2021 to collaborate on green hydrogen.[66] It also announced support for a net zero Red Sea tourism project in April 2021.[67] The Kingdom is planning to "reduce carbon emissions by more than 4 per cent of global contributions" by 2030.[68]

- Jordan is planning to install small solar power plants for at least 4,000 poor families and to increase energy efficiency in government projects (including schools, hospitals and health centres, among others).[69] Jordan will also be working to set the stage for the transition to electric mobility in the coming five-year period.[70]

- Algeria is aiming to gradually integrate renewable energies into the public works sector, and to enhance capacity for renewable electricity production by stimulating private investments. Algeria is also planning to halt the acquisition of diesel trains and to introduce fiscal and customs measures to encourage the import of electric vehicles.[71]

Several Arab countries are seeking to rationalize **water use** in agriculture, including by investing in efficient irrigation techniques in countries such as Egypt[72] and Lebanon,[73] and in rainfed agriculture through increased rainwater harvesting in countries like Somalia.[74] Investment in water treatment and reuse as a measure to address water scarcity was also underlined by some countries, including Jordan,[75] Morocco[76] and the State of Palestine.[77]

Other environmental dimensions of focus include **solid waste management** and, to a lesser extent, tackling **air pollution**, combatting **desertification** and protecting **biodiversity**.

- Tunisia is working on setting up a construction and demolition waste recovery unit in the Gabès Governorate with the capacity to handle 400,000 tons of construction and demolition waste per year. Tunisia also aims to reduce the total household waste generated by 10 per cent, increase recycling and the amount of waste intended for energy recovery by 20 per cent and 40 per cent respectively, and reduce disposal in landfills by 60 per cent by 2030.[78]

- Egypt will be focusing on tackling air pollution, including through modernizing its air quality management system and supporting solid waste management in Greater Cairo.[79]

- The State of Palestine has committed to reducing and effectively controlling pollution, promoting integrated solid and hazardous waste management and recycling, establishing nature reserves and expanding green spaces.[80]

- Mauritania will be working to fight desertification and encourage the sustainable management of forest

resources.[81] The Syrian Arab Republic also committed, among other things, to fight desertification.[82]

- Morocco will strive to achieve progress on issues of marine and terrestrial biodiversity preservation, enabling it to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 42 per cent by 2030.[83]
- Saudi Arabia is planning to increase its "protected areas to more than 30 per cent of total land area"[84] and to "plant 10 billion trees"[85] throughout the country as part of the Saudi Green Initiative.

Green finance initiatives are also being implemented in several Arab countries.

- In Egypt[86] and Morocco,[87] financial support is being provided to SMEs and local businesses to invest in green technologies, including renewable energy technologies and resource-efficient production machinery. Egypt has also issued green bonds.[88]
- Jordan is working to enhance its climate finance governance to support greater climate capital mobilization and investment.[89]
- A sustainable finance framework for 2021-2031 was launched by the United Arab Emirates. The framework aims at streamlining sustainable finance practices and strengthening public-private collaboration to enhance green and climate investments.[90]

It is worthwhile noting that the crisis led some countries to cancel or postpone planned green projects.[91] A case in point is the abolishment by the Kuwaiti cabinet of plans to build the 1.5-gigawatt Al-Dabdaba solar plant, which was expected to generate 15 per cent of the electricity requirements of the country from renewable sources by 2030.[92]

2. What countries can do moving forward

The following actions are recommended for Arab countries:

- **Aligning economic and environmental goals** is imperative for green growth. This implies setting a long-term framework for economic policy making. It also requires **coordination** between ministries of finance, economy and environment and other relevant sectoral ministries at the highest level possible to drive the process and integrate green growth objectives into wider development plans.[93]
- **Monitoring and evaluating** green growth progress will help determine the effectiveness of the policies in place.[94] Ex-ante evaluations are also important for a better understanding of possible wider social impacts and policy misalignments, including the prospects for job creation, which are core for long-standing sustainability.[95]
- Institutional mechanisms must be established or adjusted to ensure the **engagement of all the relevant stakeholders** at all stages (from policy formulation to evaluation) and at all levels (from the national to the organization level) in the development of policies that are well integrated and appropriately address all concerns. Maintaining a meaningful and effective social dialogue all through and at all levels will secure buy-in.[96]
- Building **public-private partnerships** is needed to create an enabling environment for decarbonization, with the necessary changes to existing infrastructure to support investment in and use of **new/green technologies**[97] (including incentive

schemes, financing, green public procurement, investment in research and development, and the removal of environmentally harmful subsidies,[98] among other things). Partnership between government and industry is also needed to fund retraining and reskilling commensurate with changing sector needs.[99]

- Promoting **green finance** is important to support the transition to greener economies. It requires the strengthening of regulatory frameworks and establishment of adequate enforcement mechanisms, enhancing awareness of the advantages of sustainable finance, developing incentives to advance the greening of the financial sector, expanding the pool of "bankable green projects" and enhancing institutional capacities to access climate finance.[100]

- A **just recovery** that leaves no one behind requires putting in place social protection and skills development measures to ease potential harsh impacts on the most affected sectors and employees. The latter are mainly fossil fuel workers, who risk losing their jobs, and women, who are currently underrepresented in industries where employment will be most concentrated, namely renewables, construction and manufacturing.[101]

- **Transformative education** is needed that trains learners to acknowledge and respect the interdependency between the human and natural systems, and provides them with the values, skills and motivation to transform established social and economic structures towards sustainability and resilience.

Financial flows to the region in support of **clean energy** research and development are relatively low and amounted to **$1,193.3 million** in 2018 compared to $13,972.7 million globally, with the Maghreb subregion receiving around **72%** of total regional flows
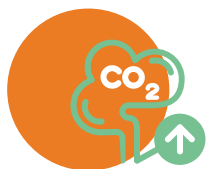
Carbon dioxide emissions per unit of manufacturing value added in the region amounted to **1.2 kg/$ in 2018** higher than the global average of 0.4 kg/$

Regional disparities ranged from **1.6 kg/$** for GCC to **0.3 kg/$** for LDCs

Pre-tax subsidies to fossil fuels in the region decreased from 6.1% of GDP in 2013 to 3.1% in 2017 but continue to be **higher than the global average of 0.6%**

Source: ESCWA, "SDG Data", United Nations ESCWA Data Portal for the Arab Region. Available at: https://data.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 1 November 2021).

Box 2. Gender just green recovery

- Environmental degradation and climate change have a disproportionate impact on women, especially the marginalized, given their greater dependence on natural resources (agriculture, fisheries and forests) for livelihood. This calls for a greater inclusion of women in decision-making on environmental issues.

- The shift to a green economy will create new jobs and greater employment opportunities in green sectors, such as renewables, where women are not well represented, especially in high and technical positions. For instance, at present, one in 10 managers in the renewable energy sector are women and 32 per cent of employment in the sector goes to women. With the decarbonization of economies, it is expected that 6 million jobs will be lost, and 24 million new ones created. It is thus important to ensure that women have access to new employment opportunities on an equal footing, including through retraining and reskilling.[a] It should be noted, however, that some new green jobs can target rural women such as those relating to the use of solar dryers for food processing, climate-smart agriculture techniques and other rural green jobs relating to ecotourism.

- The pandemic has shed light on the importance of jobs in care, health and education, where women tend to be overrepresented and more often occupy precarious positions, to social and economic welfare. These jobs are also essentially low in carbon emissions and enhancing their environmental sustainability would not require as many adjustments as in other sectors. It is consequently environmentally, economically and socially sensible to improve pay, security and flexibility for these jobs.[b]

- More climate finance needs to be channelled to gender-responsive adaptation projects in developing countries. This entails mainstreaming gender considerations in the design and implementation of climate initiatives and supporting women affected by environmental degradation to diversify their livelihoods.[c]

a UN-Women "Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice - Key messages", 2021.

b Elizabeth Hill, Rae Cooper and Frances Flanagan, "Four Building Blocks for a Gender Equitable and Sustainable Recovery", The OECD Forum Network, 16 September 2021.

c UN-Women "Beyond COVID-19: A Feminist Plan", 2021.

C. What to watch for

- Escalating **demand for energy** with COVID-19 recovery could lead to increased carbon emissions.[102]

- Potential future **declines in GDP** could be ahead if the region does not adapt to changing fossil fuel consumption patterns that will reduce energy exports in the long run.

- A ramp up is expected in **innovative financing mechanisms,** including through green sukuk, issued to finance projects with positive climate and environmental impact. Green sukuk doubled in Gulf countries in the first

half of 2021 ($6 billion) compared to 2020 ($3 billion) levels. However, they still form only 2.5 per cent of total outstanding sukuk.[103]

- There may be greater investment in **nature-based solutions** as they are "shovel-ready" and can enhance employment generation and support vulnerable populations.[104] It is estimated that nature-based solutions to climate change could generate 80 million jobs worldwide and support 1 billion people out of poverty.[105]

- Various industries will need to shift towards **green jobs** as governments and enterprises intensify their efforts to deliver on climate and sustainability goals.

- **Clean technology** will become cheaper and more widely available,

offering more solutions for a greener economy.[106]

- There will be shifts towards a **circular economy** that minimizes waste, pollution and pressure on resources, keeps material in use for much longer, and enables natural systems to regenerate, supporting environmental preservation and climate change mitigation.[107]

- There may be an accelerated trend towards **smart cities** that use information technology and data to enhance urban management, the efficient use of resources and emissions reductions, and the quality of life for residents.[108]

- Greater demand for **green products** is expected as environmental awareness is increasing.

D. Regional cooperation and integration

On intersectoral issues and transboundary environmental problems: Further efforts are needed, including the formulation and/or strengthening of regional normative frameworks that support coordination between interdependent sectors. Setting obligations may be necessary for State parties to perform environmental impact assessments on specific undertakings, and alert and consult with each other on all prospective initiatives with a possible major cross-boundary harmful environmental impact. Ministerial Councils under the League of Arab States play an important role in this area. For example, Arab agriculture and water ministers recently agreed in the joint Cairo Declaration in 2019 to join hands against the impacts of climate change, land degradation and water scarcity by harmonizing policies across the water and agricultural sectors.[109]

On advancing a regional green agenda: Strategic initiatives could be identified that address shared environmental priorities for different country groupings. For example, in 2020 ESCWA launched a Climate/SDGs Debt Swap - Donor Nexus Initiative, aimed at supporting debt relief and enhancing climate finance in middle-income Arab countries with a high and growing debt burden. The initiative "converts national debt-serving payments on foreign debt into domestic investment for implementing climate-resilient projects through collaborative arrangements between debtors, creditors and donors".[110]

On renewable energy and environmental protection technologies: A formal mechanism to support technology transfer within the region could be established to help advance environmental technology-based solutions in Arab countries and support building back greener and more resilient from the COVID-19 crisis.[111] For instance, the adoption of green technologies in agriculture, such as green fertilizers, rainwater harvesting, solar dryers, food bio-conservation, and small-scale food processing for fruits, vegetables and dairy products could help alleviate challenges related to scarcity of natural resources, access to agricultural inputs, and access to markets, among others. This would in turn build the resilience of farmers.

Digital transformation

DIGITAL ACCESS

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

TELEHEALTH

DIGITAL ECONOMY

E-GOVERNMENT

ONLINE LEARNING
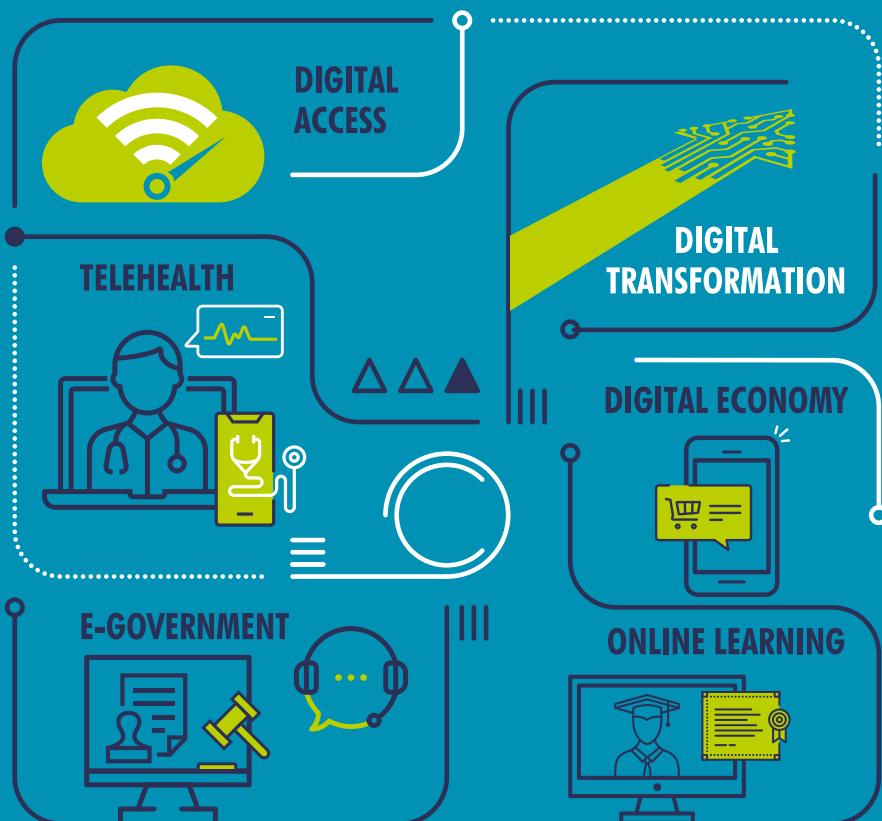
Digitalization efforts across government and business have accelerated in the Arab region out of a necessity imposed by lockdown and social distancing measures. If sustained, these efforts promise to boost digital transformation in the Arab region, unlocking a huge potential for building forward better and achieving the SDGs.

What can be learned from response measures to date and what should Arab countries consider for the longer term?

Directly related goals:

3 Building back better through digital transformation

To confront the COVID-19 pandemic and deal with its implications, individuals, government agencies and the private sector across the Arab region used digital technologies to protect lives, maintain social interaction, and ensure the continuity of education, business and public services.

Almost two years into the pandemic, Arab countries must be guided by considerations of equity, resilience and sustainability as they consider which COVID-19 digital response measures to institutionalize and scale-up. Technology megatrends and potential threats need to be kept in sight and actions taken to stimulate the systemic changes needed to build back better and achieve the 2030 Agenda in the Arab region.

> **Digital transformation is about using digital technologies to effect fundamental change to products, processes and services to better meet client needs.**

A. Digital access

1. What has been done

To enable a faster and inclusive transition online, most Arab countries sought to expand digital access.

- Internet bandwidths and speeds were increased at no additional cost in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Lebanon.

- Voice-over-IP applications were unblocked in Oman.

- High-income Arab countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia increased the availability of public Wi-Fi and supported disadvantaged groups (notably migrant workers) through the free provision of personal computers and SIM cards, online access and ICT training.

- Donor-supported programmes in underserved areas of the region, such as the State of Palestine[112] and rural Morocco[113], upgraded digital infrastructure to increase broadband coverage.

2. What countries can do moving forward

Digital transformation has the potential to drive equality, inclusion and social progress. Yet, to capture its full value and prevent the deepening or creation of new divides, countries in the region will need to address pre-existing inequalities. In particular, countries could:

- Accelerate progress in broadband Internet connectivity, bridging persistent divides across and within countries, including those based on gender, location, age, disability and literacy levels. To truly leave no one behind, all dimensions must be considered, including those of availability, accessibility, acceptability, affordability and quality.

- Increase digital literacy among all segments of society, including women, older persons and others. Digital literacy needs to be embedded

as a foundational skill in primary and secondary education.

• Promote interventions and awareness raising efforts to protect and ensure

the safety of underage users and prevent the replication of prevailing gender-based violence and inequality in the digital sphere.

Despite progress in Internet connectivity, access remains far from universal

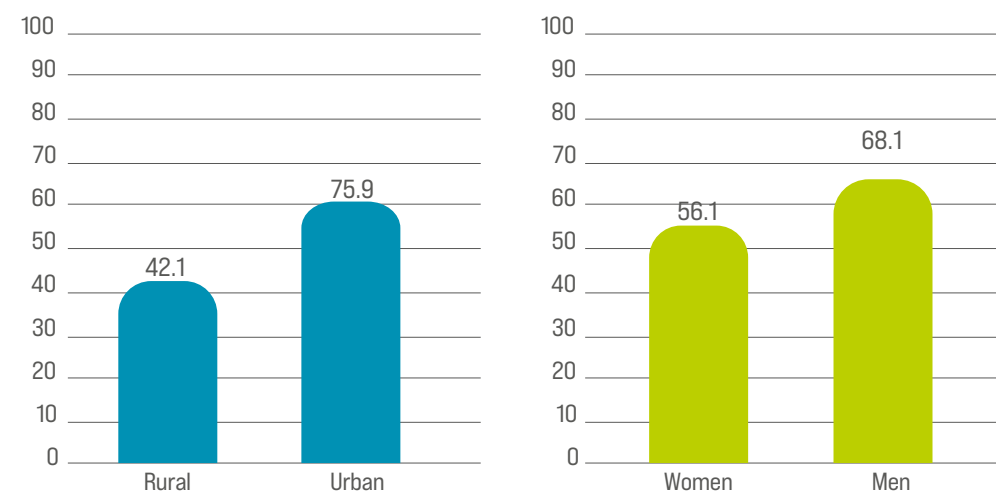**Figure 3.** Percentage of the population using the Internet
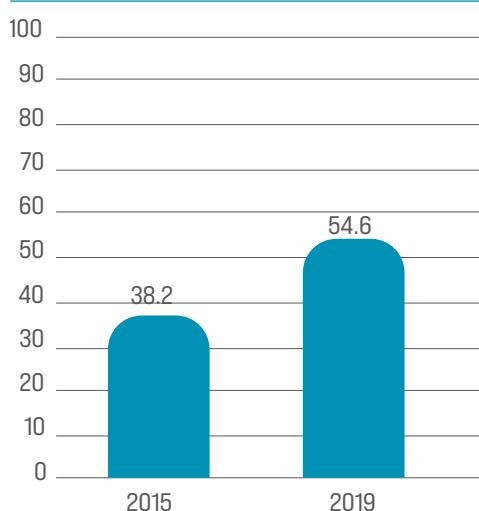
Figure 4. Percentage of the population having fixed-broadband subscriptions
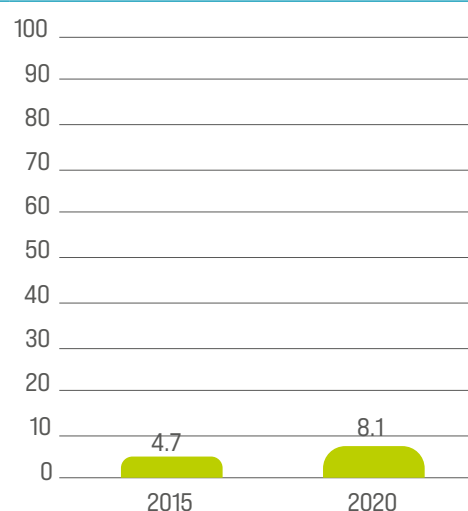
2015	38.2	
2019	54.6	

2015	4.7	
2020	8.1	

Source: ESCWA, "SDG Data", United Nations ESCWA Data Portal for the Arab Region. Available at: https://data.unescwa.org/ (accessed 30 November 2021).

Digital divides remain within countries and between countries

Figure 5. Percentage of the population using the Internet, by location and gender (2020)

Rural	42.1
Urban	75.9

Women	56.1
Men	68.1

Source: International Telecommunication Union, "International Telecommunication Union" ITU-D ICT Statistics. Available at: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed on 30 November 2021).

Figure 6. Percentage of the population using the Internet, by country (2017-2020)
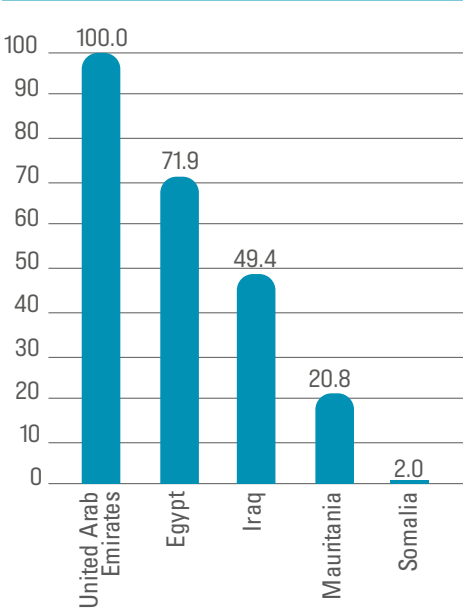
Source: International Telecommunication Union, "International Telecommunication Union" ITU-D ICT Statistics. Available at: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx (accessed on 30 November 2021).

There is a need to prevent online violence against women and girls

Figure 7. Percentage of survey participants knowing or witnessing online harassment against women (2020)
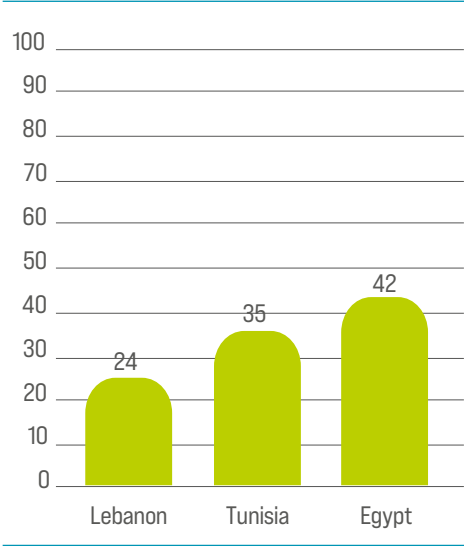
Source: UN-Women, "Rapid Assessment: The Effects of COVID-19 on Violence Against Women and Gendered Social Norms - Results of web-based surveys from nine countries in the Arab States", 2020; UN-Women, "Tunisian women in the face of COVID-19: during and after confinement", 2020.

B. Online learning

1. What has been done

Arab countries ordered schools to close during the pandemic for an average length of 24.1 weeks[114]. To minimize disruption to learning, most countries instituted distance learning programmes that varied widely depending on context.

- In countries where Internet penetration remains low and where large numbers of households lack the hardware necessary to access online platforms, such as the State of Palestine and Yemen, traditional broadcast media such as radio and

television were employed to reach as many students as possible.

- In some cases, online learning programmes consisted of curated collections of reading material and videos assembled by the Ministry of Education, which could be accessed by students with guidance from a teacher (for example, EduNet in Bahrain and the Educational Platform in Egypt). To complement these platforms, schools often utilized social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook to maintain communication between students, teachers and parents.

- More advanced cases included a comprehensive transition to online Learning Management Systems and Video Conferencing tools to manage assignments and course resources and allow live interactions between students and their teachers (for example, in the United Arab Emirates).

- In addition to K-12 and university education, some countries utilized online platforms to promote the upskilling of their labour force, including programmes targeting those who have lost their job as a result of the pandemic or need training to adapt to teleworking and the digital economy (such as the Doroob platform in Saudi Arabia).[115]

Online learning

20 Arab countries introduced or expanded distance learning programmes

Source: UNESCO, "National learning platforms and tools", n.d.

2. What countries can do moving forward

The shift to online education in most Arab countries proved that swift, widescale changes to education systems are possible with determination, and the active support of all stakeholders, government and non-government, including families and communities. Arab countries could:

- Consider the potential value, post-COVID-19, of an effective hybrid model of education, and the changes needed to get there. The use of digital technology could indeed increase the

26.9% of the region's adults

were illiterate in 2019 including **20.2% of men** and **34.1% of women**

90% of the Arab region's population

had access to electricity in 2019

However, only **41%** of residents in the LDCs have access to power

90.8% of the population

was covered by a 3G or better mobile network in 2019

resilience of education systems and break barriers, giving students the capacity to learn anywhere, anytime and at their own pace, and facilitating the role of teachers.[116]

- Invest in inclusive ICT infrastructure, offer adequate teacher support and digital skilling, and provide support to the most vulnerable.

- Mobilize efforts to rebuild the infrastructure needed to enable remote learning opportunities to students in areas of conflict. A big proportion of the 37 million schoolchildren in the region who could not access distance learning programmes during school closures[117] live in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, where conflicts have resulted in the destruction of and damage to more than 8,850 schools and affected infrastructure.[118]

- Build regional and global partnerships that support innovation and expertise sharing in digitalization in the education sector, including in online learning technology development.

C. Telehealth

1. What has been done

Governments across the Arab region developed web portals to raise public awareness of the virus, promote safe behaviours and inform inhabitants about the state of the pandemic in their countries.

- Websites, mobile apps and surveillance systems were used to trace contacts, monitor movements and issue permits. Public health officials encouraged (or in some cases, mandated) the use of contact tracing applications that use smartphone's

Bluetooth and GPS capabilities to track potential exposures to COVID-19. In some cases, GPS-enabled mobile applications were used to enforce quarantine measures for suspected cases or arrivals from abroad.[119]

- Some websites, including that of the Ministry of Public Health of Qatar, were enhanced with artificial intelligence-powered chat robots to direct users to resources and assess symptoms.

- The Tawakkalna application[120] in Saudi Arabia evolved throughout the pandemic to host a suite of services for users, including contact tracing, permits to leave a residence during periods of curfew or hold a gathering, booking COVID-19 tests and vaccine appointments, and accessing vaccination records.

- In some GCC countries, such as Oman and Qatar, surveillance technologies such as drones, thermal cameras and other devices were deployed by police to screen suspected cases.

- The spread of COVID-19-related misinformation and disinformation through digital channels arose as a truly complex societal threat, contributing to high levels of vaccine hesitancy in countries including Algeria, Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia.[121] Efforts to denounce fake news and disinformation about COVID-19 were common in Arab countries. One example is the fact-checking tool of Iraq.[122]

Digitalization also entered the practice of healthcare in many Arab countries. As COVID-19 strained health systems around the world, many governments turned to technology to reinforce social distancing and preserve

hospital resources for those urgently needing in-person attention. Donor support was extended to countries in conflict to strengthen their digital healthcare capabilities.

- In countries where telemedicine regulations and infrastructure were already in place, as in several GCC countries, web-based platforms and mobile applications were expanded, and new ones made available to meet the increasing demand for teleconsultations. One such example was the development of apps by the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia.[123]

- New and enhanced work models emerged involving healthcare service providers, pharmacies and health insurance companies in Bahrain.[124]

- In Somalia, the International Organization for Migration worked with the Somalia Humanitarian Fund and the Ministry of Health to procure ICT equipment and establish a network linking diaspora doctors with local clinics to give real-time recommendations for patient management.[125]

Combating COVID-19 misinformation

10 Arab countries reported efforts to monitor and combat misinformation related to COVID-19

Source: Zachary Bampton, "The varying appetites for COVID vaccination in the MENA", 7 July 2021.

2. What countries can do moving forward

- Enhance trust and acceptability of contact tracing applications by clarifying mandates to use these applications, ensuring legal protection of user data and preventing potential abuse of the surveillance capabilities permitted by these applications.[126]

- Establish governance frameworks to counter health-related misinformation and disinformation while protecting freedom of expression.[127]

- Capitalize on the surge in acceptance and practice of telehealth brought about by the pandemic and undertake policy and regulatory changes to enable further growth in this sector, thus helping to address shortages in healthcare provision capacity in the region.

- Promote the responsible use of the big data collected on the spread of the pandemic in health sector research activities, relying on the power of artificial intelligence.

D. Digital economy

1. What has been done

To maintain business continuity under social distancing constraints, enterprises made use of ICT to enable teleworking where feasible. While figures concerning the number of employees who benefited from this work option in the region are not available, some level of teleworking was reported in all Arab countries regardless of prevailing levels of connectivity and digital literacy.

Many middle- and high-income Arab countries sought to boost electronic commerce. This was true not only in countries where an e-commerce culture pre-dated the pandemic,[128] but across the region, suggesting increased consumer acceptance of online shopping, and an increased confidence among businesses, especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs), in the viability of operating online. As part of the shift towards operating online:

- Online platforms were established, often through public-private partnerships, to help SMEs sell their products and services online. One example is the virtual mall launched by the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism of Bahrain.[129]

- Technical support was provided such as training in product design and e-commerce techniques. Examples include the NilePreneurs initiative launched by the Central Bank of Egypt.[130]

- Legal help was provided, including to setup e-business, such as through the electronic business registry in Somalia.[131]

- In the tourism sector, which was particularly hit by the pandemic, virtual tours of museums and archaeological sites were developed. Examples of this were observed in Egypt and Lebanon.

Electronic payments and other digital financial services were expanded in several countries of the region. For example:

- Financial institutions opened digital services to a wider population (including migrant workers in some countries). Efforts were coupled with

financial awareness and literacy campaigns, leading to a significant increase in adoption rates and contributing to financial inclusion.

- Limits on mobile phone payments were increased.

- Fees on e-payments were reduced or cancelled. For example, an electronic service for paying bills in Jordan, increased its customer base by some 100,000 in the 2nd quarter of 2020, and saw the doubling of its transactions through Jordan Mobile Payments Switch.[132]

Digital innovation and entrepreneurship also garnered attention from development actors and governments. For example:

- Hackathons were organized in several countries challenging people, especially youth, to develop innovative digital solutions to address the impacts of the crisis.

- Occasionally, efforts focused on selected vulnerable groups. In Algeria, digital solutions were sought to facilitate trade among Sahrawi refugee camp residents.[133]

2. What countries can do moving forward

The increase in e-commerce and digital innovation, spearheaded by the private sector, including SMEs, is a positive outcome from the pandemic. Bolstered by expanded digital access and measures to increase electronic payment services, it offers prospects for improving the resilience of Arab economies. Arab countries must capitalize on this momentum to boost skilled job creation, diversify their

economies and increase the share of economic value added from medium and high-tech industry. In particular, Arab countries are encouraged to:

- Adopt comprehensive and long-term e-commerce strategies to promote an enabling environment where no business is left behind. Strategies include introducing legal and regulatory reforms to enhance online transaction security, digital skilling, modernizing postal services, connecting local markets to e-commerce supply chains, and closing ICT and electricity infrastructure gaps that leave rural regions behind.

- Expand e-payments (including mobile payments) to enhance financial inclusion in the region, which lags significantly behind world averages. The development of robust functional digital financial identity systems, which are presently lacking in most Arab countries, could constitute a driver for a safe growth in this area.[134]

- Boost investment in the ICT sector and assist firms in moving up global value chains through research, development, and innovation targeting artificial intelligence and other 4th industrial revolution technologies. Countries should also develop an enabling environment for ICT innovation and entrepreneurship to accelerate economic recovery.

- Establish clear, win-win teleworking policies, and introduce or expand telework incentives based on local experiences.[135] Telework offers opportunities for enhancing work-life and gender balance, reducing traffic and employee commute times, and including more persons with disabilities in the workforce.[136]

Arab countries spent 0.7% of GDP on research and development in 2018 far behind the **global average of 1.7%**

37.2% of adults (15+) had an account at a bank or other financial institution or had a mobile-money-service provider in 2017

Source: ESCWA, "SDG Data", United Nations ESCWA Data Portal for the Arab Region. Available at: https://data.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 30 November 2021).

E. E-Government

1. What has been done

E-government efforts were expedited, and smart channels of services expanded in several Arab countries. Teleworking public service employees and online service portals allowed for the continued delivery of certain public services at the national and local levels.

Countries that were more advanced in this area prior to the pandemic were better prepared to quickly adapt and expand e-government services.

- The United Arab Emirates launched the Digital Customer and Digital Government Service Policy[137] to enhance user experience, and improve efficiency and integration. Several government agencies in the country are using virtual assistants powered by artificial intelligence to support interaction with customers.

- Programmes were launched to build the digital skills of the public sector workforce to be able to better support the shift to e-services in Saudi Arabia.[138]

- Efforts were increased to inter-connect government agencies and enhance information exchange over fast and secure networks, adopting high cybersecurity standards. Examples include the Secure Government Network in Jordan.[139]

- Virtual court hearings and notarial services were instated in several countries, including Algeria, Egypt and Morocco, with some countries amending legislation to maintain this mode of operation even beyond the COVID-19 crisis (Bahrain[140] and the United Arab Emirates[141]).

- E-government services to combat gender-based violence were expanded. Increased reports of violence against women led governments in the region (often with the support of non-government actors) to establish or increase the number of hotlines and websites to raise awareness, report abuse and provide services to survivors. Key examples of this were observed in Lebanon.[142]

- Digital technologies entered further in the realm of humanitarian assistance. In several Arab conflict-affected countries and LDCs, digital technologies were increasingly used by humanitarian actors to reach households impacted by the pandemic. In Libya for example, a chatbot that uses artificial intelligence was deployed to communicate with people using the local dialect, leading to better humanitarian assistance delivery and programme impact.[143]

2. What countries can do moving forward

- Push forward the e-government agenda and maintain the COVID-19 momentum for well-designed web-portals and e-tools that increase transparency, facilitate access to information, and ensure a clear and consistent application of rules and regulations.
- Consider citizen needs and requirements in developing online services and improve stakeholder participation and engagement in the process.
- Make e-government policies and strategies gender-responsive, contributing to women empowerment and protection. An effective balance between digital processes and human elements of service delivery is important to ensure the inclusion of disadvantaged women.[144]
- Continue building the digital readiness and capacity of their public administration workforce and physical infrastructure.
- Undertake comprehensive, justice-centred evaluations of e-justice. Although interventions such as virtual court hearings helped prevent interruptions and delays in the justice system, they have raised concerns regarding the risk of digital divides preventing access to justice, and the appropriateness of online media for some types of cases where fairness could be compromised (such as in criminal cases).[145]
- Strengthen the protection of digital human rights by instituting legal and policy safeguards for data protection and privacy, as well as digital identity, building on lessons learned from the pandemic.

Box 3. Gender just digital transformation

- A true digital transformation is an opportunity to advance gender equality and women's empowerment in the Arab region in all spheres. Benefits are not automatic, however, and caveats must be addressed.
- The gender gap in digital connectivity and literacy continues to prevail in the Arab region and needs to be bridged.
- Conscious efforts at all levels are needed to prevent the replication of gender-based discriminations and violence in the digital sphere.
- E-government policies and strategies need to be made gender-responsive, contributing to women empowerment and protection.
- Women need to be active partners and to actively engage in the development of ICT and e-government strategies.

F. What to watch for[146]

- The use of **artificial intelligence** and **robotic automation** is expected to become widespread in business, impacting economies and the world of work.

- There will be exponential growth in cross-border **Internet traffic** and increasing reliance on big data and data analytics technologies, with a need for innovative data governance approaches.

- The global rate of **Internet connectivity** continues to grow; yet, as digital technologies continue to evolve, other divides are emerging that relate to the skills and ability to use these technologies by different social groups.

- There will be increasingly seamless **fusion of digital technologies** with the physical world, and a shift in decision-making from humans to algorithms, leading to increased concerns over digital human rights, and a greater need for ethical and legal frameworks.

- The growing **environmental impact** of digital technologies, such as the ramp up of electricity consumption by artificial intelligence applications, will need to be addressed.

- **Cybercrime** and breaches of cybersecurity, data protection and privacy are expected to increase.

- Cities will seek to develop **smart infrastructure** and adopt automated and data-driven approaches, including for planning an ensuring security.

- The use of **surveillance technology** to protect citizens will increase, with possible implications on civil rights, freedoms and privacy.

G. Regional cooperation and integration

On international and regional digital cooperation frameworks: Arab countries continue to exert digital cooperation efforts in line with international and regional frameworks, notably the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Lines.[147] An **Arab Digital Agenda** is presently being prepared under the umbrella of the League of Arab States that could foster further regional cooperation and integration for promoting information economies and societies.[148]

Examples of on-going regional cooperation in the digital realm include:

- The Arab Digital Inclusion Platform aims to enhance the e-accessibility of persons with disabilities.[149]
- The GEMS Maturity Index proposes regional benchmarks for the digitization of government services.[150]
- The Digital Arabic Content Award aims to boost the development of digital Arabic content that has a clear impact on society.[151]
- The Arab Regional Cybersecurity Center acts as a catalyst for regional cooperation to address escalating cyber threats.[152]
- The initiative on Open Government in the Arab Region aims at encouraging and supporting Arab countries to move towards open government.[153]

On open-source digital solutions: Arab countries could collaborate to develop solutions that are people-centric and have the potential to reduce inequalities and accelerate the attainment of all SDGs. Arab countries could join existing digital public goods alliances,[154] or establish a regional alliance, to foster the collaborative development of such goods. Potential areas from the pandemic include open-source health information management systems that could be easily deployed by low- and middle-income countries.[155]

On policy evaluation: To better inform regional cooperation and integration in the area of digital transformation, policy evaluation across the region must be pursued to increase ex-post peer-learning from digital COVID-19 response measures but also to improve ex-ante understanding of the potential for digital innovation to effectively bridge gaps in education, healthcare, justice systems and other sectors, particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries.

> ❝
> **Digital public goods include "open-source software, open data, open artificial intelligence models, open standards and open content that adhere to privacy and other applicable international and domestic laws, standards and best practices and do no harm."**
>
> United Nations, "Report of the Secretary-General, Roadmap for Digital Cooperation", June 2020.

Endnotes

1. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021); World Bank, "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures", version 15, (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2021).

2. World Bank, "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19", 2021.

3. Ibid.

4. World Food Programme, "WFP's Work in Enabling Social Protection in Somalia: Highlights of the World Food Programme's Contributions to Social Protection in a New Normal", 2021.

5. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), "Role of Social Protection Information Systems in Expansion of Cash Transfer Programmes during Covid-19 Pandemic: Experience from Selected Arab Countries", Strengthening Social Protection for Pandemic Responses, 2021.

6. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021); International Policy Centre for Inclusive Growth (IPCIG), "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South: Online Dashboard", 2021 (accessed on 15 September 2021); World Bank, "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19", 2021.

7. Egypt, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, "Egypt's 2021 Voluntary National Review", 2021.

8. Marina Wes, "Building Back Better: Supporting Egypt's efforts at inclusive recovery", World Bank, 22 June 2021.

9. Watania, The Ministry of Social Development disbursed allocations for the month of April 2020 – Link to verify the names of beneficiaries. (Arabic original title: صرف شيكات الشؤون الاجتماعية لشهر 4/2020)، رابط فحص أسماء المستفيدين..)، 14 April 2020.

10. Gnet, The National Fund for Retirement and Social Security announces the dispersal of pension funds (French original title: Tunisie : La CNRPS annonce le versement des pensions à partir de demain, mercredi), 23 March 2021.

11. Ahram Online, "Egypt's Sisi issues decree raising pensions 14% starting July", 1 July 2020.

12. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021); IPCIG, "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South: Online Dashboard", 2021 (accessed on 15 September 2021).

13. Iraq, The Cabinet, "Cabinet approves draft pension and social security law, authorises signing of contract for automating customs procedures", 18 November 2020.

14. International Labour Organization (ILO), "Oman institutes its first unemployment insurance scheme", 16 October 2020.

15. Le Point, In Morocco, the implementation of generalized social protection (French original title: Maroc: la couverture sociale généralisée mise en œuvre), 16 April 2021; Slate, In the midst of a pandemic, Morocco aims to revolutionize its social protection system (French original title: En pleine pandémie, le Maroc veut révolutionner sa protection sociale), 29 April 2021.

16. ESCWA, "Social Protection Reform in Arab Countries", 2019.

17. United Nations, "Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/ARAB States region", 2020.

18. ESCWA, "Social Inequalities in the Arab Region Post-COVID-19", 2021.

19. United Nations, "Social Protection Responses to the COVID-19 crisis in the MENA/ARAB States region", 2020.

20. Ibid.

21. ESCWA, "Targeted Social Protection in Arab Countries before and During the COVID-19 Crisis", Strengthening Social Protection for Pandemic Responses, 2021.

22. Ibid.

23. World Bank, "Comoros: World Bank Provides $10 Million to Support Emergency Response to COVID-19 and Recovery", 10 December 2020.

24. World Bank, "Lebanon Emergency Crisis and Covid-19 Response Social Safety Net Project", 4 November 2021.

25. ESCWA, "Role of Social Protection Information Systems", 2021.

26. ESCWA, "Social Inequalities in the Arab Region Post-COVID-19", 2021.

27. ESCWA, "Targeted Social Protection in Arab Countries", 2021.

28. Ibid.

29. IPCIG, "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South: Online Dashboard", 2021 (accessed on 15 September 2021).

30. Ibid.

31. Business News, In Tunisia, the launch of digital wallets (French original title: Tunisie - Mise en place du portefeuille digital), 5 May 2020.

32. IPCIG, "Social protection responses to COVID-19 in the Global South: Online Dashboard", 2021 (accessed on 15 September 2021).

33. Mauritania, Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Modernisation of Administration, Distribution of food products and disinfectants to labour unions (French original title: Distribution de produits alimentaires et de désinfectants aux syndicats), n.d.

34. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021).

35. ESCWA, "Social Protection Reform in Arab Countries", 2019.

36. Ibid.

37. ESCWA, "Role of Social Protection Information Systems", 2021.

38. ILO, "Social Protection Spotlight: Extending social protection to informal workers in the COVID-19 crisis: country responses and policy considerations", 14 September 2020.

39. Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Social Protection's Contribution to Social Cohesion", 2021.

40. United Nations. The Impact of COVID-19 on Migrants and Refugees in the Arab Region. 2020.

41. ILO, World Social Protection Report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2017).

42. A/RES/73/195.

43. Olivier De Schutter, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, and Magdalena Sepúlveda, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty And Human Rights, "Executive Summary: A Global Fund for Social Protection (GFSP)", 2012.

44. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021).

45. Ibid.

46. Oman, Ministry of Finance, "Economic Stimulus Plan", 2021.

47. PWC, "Oman: Budget 2021 & 10th Five year development plan (2021-2025) - continued focus on diversification & maintaining deficit", 2021.

48. United Nations, COVID-19 Stimulus Tracker. Available at: http://tracker.unescwa.org/ (accessed on 8 October 2021).

49. El Watan News, 21 economic decisions announced by president el-Sissi to confront the coronavirus crisis (Arabic original title: 21 قرارا اقتصاديا أعلنها الرئيس السيسي لمواجهة أزمة كورونا), 22 March 2020.

50. Gulf News, "Coronavirus: Sharjah's 47-point stimulus package suspends eviction judgments, jail rulings on all rental-related cases", 31 March 2020.

51. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "COVID-19 Government Measures Dataset", COVID-19 Pandemic, Humanitarian Data Exchange. Available at: https://data.humdata.org/dataset/acaps-covid19-government-measures-dataset (accessed on 19 November 2021).

52. World Bank, "Social Protection and Jobs Responses to COVID-19: A Real-Time Review of Country Measures", version 6, (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2020).

53. ESCWA, "Strengthening the capacity of the water and sanitation sector in Arab countries to deal with the COVID-19 crisis" (Arabic original title: تقوية قدرة قطاع المياه والصرف الصحي في البلدان على مواجهة كوفيد 19 (العربية، (E/ESCWA/CL1.CCS/2021/TP.6).

54. Ibid.

55. El Watan News, 21 economic decisions announced by president el-Sissi to confront the coronavirus crisis (Arabic original title: 21 قرارا اقتصاديا أعلنها الرئيس السيسي لمواجهة أزمة كورونا), 22 March 2020.

56. MENAFN, "Qatar announces QR75bn stimulus for private sector", 16 March 2020.

57. Vivid Economics, "The Greenness of Stimulus Index", 6th Edition, 2021.

58. ESCWA, "Strengthening the capacity of the water and sanitation sector in Arab countries to deal with the COVID-19 crisis" (Arabic original title: تقوية قدرة قطاع المياه والصرف الصحي في البلدان على مواجهة كوفيد 19 (العربية، (E/ESCWA/CL1.CCS/2021/TP.6).

59. Khaleej Times, "Covid-19: Fees reduced, cancelled under Abu Dhabi stimulus package", 17 March 2020.

60. Weqaya, "COVID-19: Sharjah govt announces second stimulus package", 6 November 2020.

61. Oman, Ministry of Finance, "Economic Stimulus Plan", 2021.

62. Vivid Economics, "The Greenness of Stimulus Index", 2021; OECD, "The OECD Green Recovery Database: Examining the environmental implications of COVID-19 recovery policies", 2021.

63. Yuyan Zhang, "Promoting Green Development", G20 Insights, 1 September 2017.

64. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Cutting Emissions and Budget Deficits for a Post-Pandemic World: Fossil fuel subsidy reform and carbon pricing, Global Subsidies Initiative (Nordic Council of Ministers/Publication Unit, Copenhagen, 2020).

65. United Arab Emirates, Official Portal of the UAE Government, "Operation 300bn, the United Arab Emirates industrial strategy", 12 October 2021.

66. Green hydrogen is "hydrogen fuel that is created using renewable energy instead of fossil fuels. It has the potential to provide clean power for manufacturing, transportation, and more - and its only by product is water". Renee Cho, "Why We Need Green Hydrogen", Columbia Climate School, 7 January 2021.

67. Vivid Economics, "The Greenness of Stimulus Index", 2021.

68. Saudi Green Initiative, "Reducing Emissions", n.d.

69. Jordan, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, The Government's Indicative Executive Programme (2021-2024), Part 1 (Arabic title: البرنامج التنفيذي التأشيري للحكومة (2021-2024) الجزء الأول) and Part 2 (Arabic title: البرنامج التنفيذي التأشيري للحكومة (2021-2024) الجزء الثاني), 2021.

70. Jordan, Ministry of Environment, "Transport Sector: Green Growth National Action Plan 2021-2025", 2020.

71. Algeria, Services du Premier Ministre, "Economic Recovery Plan 2020-2024" (French original title: Plan de Relance Économique 2020-2024"), 2021.

72. Egypt, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, "Egypt's 2021 Voluntary National Review", 2021.

73. Lebanon, Ministry of Agriculture, "National Agriculture Strategy 2020-2025", 2020.

74. Somalia, Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development, "National Development Plan 2020 to 2024", 2020.

75. Jordan, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, The Government's Indicative Executive Programme (2021-2024) Part 1 and Part 2, 2021.

76. Morocco, Voluntary National Review of SDG implementation (French original title: Examen National Volontaire De La Mise En Œuvre Des Objectifs De Développement Durable), 2020.

77. The State of Palestine Prime Minister's Office, "National Development Plan 2021-2023", 2020.

78. Tunisia, "National Voluntary Report On The Implementation of SDGs 2021" (French original title: Rapport National Volontaire Sur La Mise En Œuvre Des Objectifs De Développement Durable), 2021.

79. Marina Wes, "Building Back Better", 2021.

80. The State of Palestine Prime Minister's Office, "National Development Plan 2021-2023", 2020.

81. Platform for Redesign 2020, "Mauritania", 8 October 2020.

82. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Syrian Arab Republic: Voluntary National Review 2020", Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2020.

83. Morocco, Voluntary National Review of SDG implementation (French original title: Examen National Volontaire De La Mise En Œuvre Des Objectifs De Développement Durable), 2020.

84. Saudi Green Initiative, "Reducing Emissions", n.d.

85. Ibid.

86. IISD, "Two programs support green recovery in Egypt", 13 November 2021; The Financial, "EBRD, EU and GCF boost green finance in Egypt", 11 November 2020.

87. IISD, "EU and EBRD: finance for green recovery in Egypt, Morocco and Eastern Partnership countries", 3 July 2020.

88. Enterprise Press, "Egypt is poised to ride 2021's green bond wave, 16 March 2021.

89. World Bank, "World Bank Supports Jordan's Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Recovery", 14 June 2021.

90. UAE Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, "UAE Sustainable Finance Framework 2021 – 2031", 2021. Available at: https://www.moccae.gov.ae/assets/download/24b84d14/UAE_Sustainable_framework_21.pdf.aspx.

91. Center for Applied Research on Partnership with the Orient (CARPO), "Post COVID-19: A Potential for Green Recovery in the Arab Gulf States", 2021.

92. NS Energy, "Kuwait scraps 1.5GW Al-Dabdaba solar project due to coronavirus impact", 14 July 2020.

93. OECD, Towards green growth: Tracking progress, (Paris, OECD publishing, 2015).

94. Ibid.

95. OECD, "The OECD Green Recovery Database", 2021.

96. ILO, "Just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all", ILO ACTRAV Policy Brief, 2018.

97. The Leadership Group for Industry Transition, "Reaching Net-Zero Industry Through Public-Private Partnerships", 28 May 2021.

98. ESCWA, "Policy Options for Promoting Green Technologies in the Arab Region"

99. OECD, "Making the green recovery work for jobs, income and growth", 6 October 2020.

100. United Nations Environment Programme, Promoting Sustainable Finance and Climate Finance in the Arab Region (Geneva, UNEP, 2021).

101. ILO, World Employment and Social Outlook 2018: Greening with Jobs (International Labour Office – Geneva: ILO, 2018).

102. European Parliament, "Global Mega-Trends. Scanning the Post-Coronavirus Horizon", 2020.

103. Owen Bennet, "Green sukuk market won't ignite without Gulf governments backing, warns top Fitch Ratings analyst", Arab News, 7 September 2021.

104. Vivid Economics, "The Greenness of Stimulus Index", 2021.

105. ESCWA, "Technical note on co-benefits of adaptation and mitigation for climate actions: Nature-based solutions", E/ESCWA/CLI1.CSS/2021/TP.1, 2021.

106. Damian Carrington, "World leaders announce plan to make green tech cheaper than alternatives", The Guardian, 2 November 2021.

107. David McGinty, "How to Build a Circular Economy", World Resources Institute, 6 August 2020.

108. Steph Pietras, Alyson Marks and Grant Cameron, "Mobilizing 'Smart City' Growth for a Resilient Future", Thematic Research Network on Data and Statistics (TReNDS), 14 June 2021.

109. ESCWA, "Arab agriculture and water ministers agree to join hands against impacts of climate change, land degradation and water scarcity", 4 April 2019.

110. ESCWA, "Climate/SDGs debt swap mechanisms", 2021.

111. Yuyan Zhang, "Promoting Green Development", 2017.

112. World Bank, "US$20 Million to Boost Digital Development in the Palestinian Territories", 26 March 2021.

113. World Bank, "Expanding digital and financial inclusion: World Bank supports Morocco's reforms for social and economic resilience" 17 June 2021.

114. http://covid19.uis.unesco.org/global-monitoring-school-closures-covid19/country-dashboard/

115. Edx, "Doroob: Free online courses from Doroob", n.d.

116. World Bank, "Lessons for Education from COVID-19 Responses", n.d.

117. UNICEF, "COVID-19: Are children able to continue learning during school closures?", 2020.

118. UNICEF, "Middle East and North Africa: Education", n.d.

119. Access Now, "COVID-19 contact-tracing apps in MENA: a privacy nightmare", 18 June 2020.

120. Saudi Arabia, Artificial Intelligence Authority, "Tawakkalna", n.d.

121. Zachary Bampton, "The varying appetites for COVID vaccination in the MENA", 7 July 2021.

122. UNESCO, "UNESCO launches Iraqi Fact-Checking Platform (IFCT)", 26 September

123. Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Health, "MOH Apps for Smartphones", 2021.

124. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Physical and Mental Well-being and the Role of Telemedicine during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Bahrain", 2021.

125. International Organization for Migration, "IOM Somalia Supports New 'Telemedicine' Enhancement for Migrants and Host Communities", 15 January 2021.

126. Access Now, "COVID-19 contact-tracing apps in MENA: a privacy nightmare", 18 June 2020.

127. Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, Balancing Act: Countering Digital Disinformation While Respecting Freedom of Expression, (Geneva, International Telecommunication Union, 2020).

128. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), COVID-19 And E-Commerce: A Global Review, (New York, United Nations, 2020).

129. Bahrain, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, "About mall.bh", n.d.

130. Central Bank of Egypt, NilePreneurs website (Arabic title: هدفنا عالم مبتكر), n.d.

131. Somalia, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, "Welcome to Somalia Business Registry", n.d.

132. Dina AlSalhi and others, "Lockdown But Not Shutdown: The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Financial Services In Jordan", JOPACC, 2020.

133. United Nations Algeria, "United Nations: 2020 Algeria Annual Report", 2021.

134. Dina AlSalhi and others, "Lockdown But Not Shutdown", 2020.

135. ILO, "Teleworking arrangements during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond", 2021.

136. World Bank Group, "Digital Jobs for Youth with Disabilities", 2021.

137. United Arab Emirates, Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and Prime Minister's Office, "The Digital Customer and Digital Government Service Policy" (Arabic original title: سياسة "المتعامل الرقمي والخدمة الحكومية الرقمية)، 2021.

138. Arab News, "Program launched to boost digital skills of employees in Saudi govt sector", 10 October 2021.

139. Jordan, Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship, "The National Digital Transformation Strategy & Implementation Plan: 2021-2025", 2021.

140. Zawya, "Bahrain's virtual courts plan approved", 23 March 2020.

141. United Arab Emirates, Official Portal of the UAE Government, "Virtual litigation", 2021.

142. Lebanon, Internal Security Forces, "Inspector General" (Arabic original title: المفتشية العامة), n.d.

143. OCHA, "A chatbot named Mila: Answering the call for people in Libya", 17 May 2021.

144. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), "E-Government for Women's Empowerment in Asia and the Pacific", 2016.

145. Cristina Lago, "Virtual justice: Online trials are an opportunity to reform the court system", Tech Monitor, 11 May 2021.

146. United Nations, "Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time", 2020.

147. For an analytical summary of these efforts, see: ESCWA, "Arab Digital Development Report 2019", 2019.

148. ESCWA, "First ESCWA-LAS Joint Workshop on Developing the Arab Digital Agenda / ICT Strategy A standalone Side-Event in parallel to the 32nd Arab Working Group on the Arab ICT strategy", n.d.

149. ESCWA, "Arab Digital Inclusion Platform", 2020.

150. ESCWA, "Government electronic & mobile services", 2014.

151. ESCWA, "Digital Arabic Content Award", 2021.

152. ITU Arab Regional Cyber Security Center, "ARCC", n.d.

153. ESCWA, "Open Government in the Arab Region", 2018.

154. Notably the Digital Public Goods Alliance (DPGA), endorsed by the United Nations Secretary-General: DPGA, "Promoting digital public goods to create a more equitable world", n.d.

155. The DHIS2, a global health information management system, developed by the HISP Centre at the University of Oslo is an example: DHIS2, "The world's largest health information management system — developed through global collaboration led by UiO", n.d.

SDG Data

The present section sets out charts of selected SDG data at the regional and subregional levels, providing comparisons to the world where available. Data was obtained from the Arab SDG Monitor as at January 2022. Key messages are also provided for each Goal, including on the level of data availability.

For further statistics, see

Arab SDG Monitor

Arab Data Portal

1 NO POVERTY

Evidence strength

54%
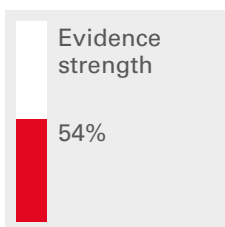
SDG 1 – No poverty

- Poverty remains widespread in the Arab region, which has seen the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line increase sharply since 2010, contrary to the world trend. Poverty among those employed is also increasing in the region.

- While the share of vulnerable employment is decreasing and is way below the world's average, it remains more pronounced among women.

- The adult illiteracy rate remains above the world's average, and is significant among women.

- The Arab region has made progress in providing basic water and sanitation services to residents, surpassing the world's average on the latter.

Data is unavailable for several key indicators, such as disaster-related indicators.

1.1.1 Population below international poverty line (Percentage)
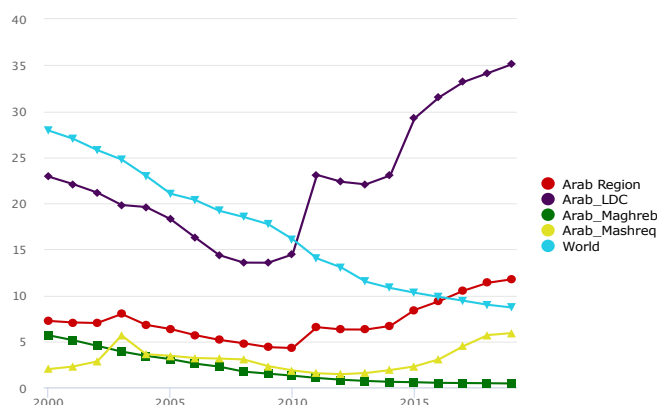
1.1.1 Employed population below the international poverty line (Percentage)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- Arab_GCC
- Arab_LDC
- Arab_Maghreb
- Arab_Mashreq
- World
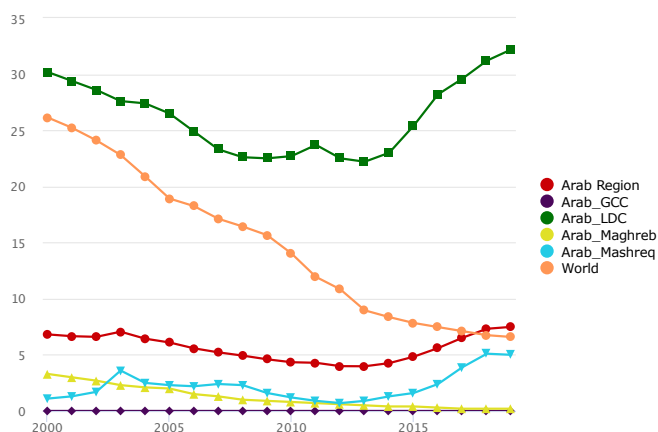
1.2x Adult illiteracy rate (Percentage)

Legend:
- Arab Region (Both Sexes)
- Arab Region (Females)
- Arab Region (Males)
- World (Both Sexes)
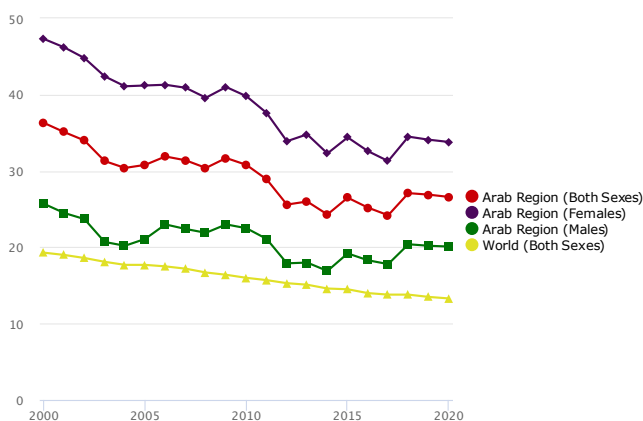
1.3x Vulnerable employment, by sex (Percentage)

Legend:
- Arab Region (Both Sexes)
- Arab Region (Females)
- Arab Region (Males)
- World (Both Sexes)
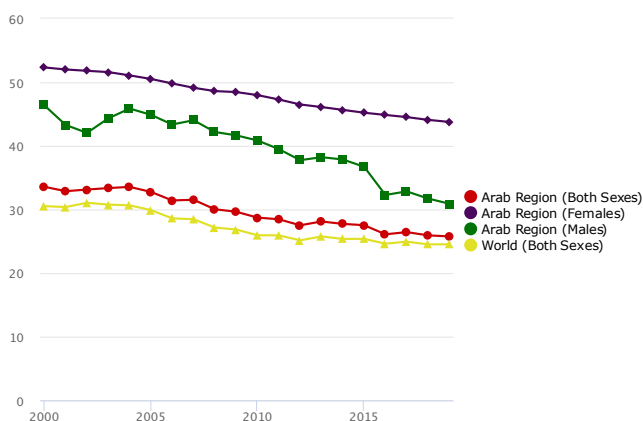
1.4.1 Population using basic drinking water services (Percentage)
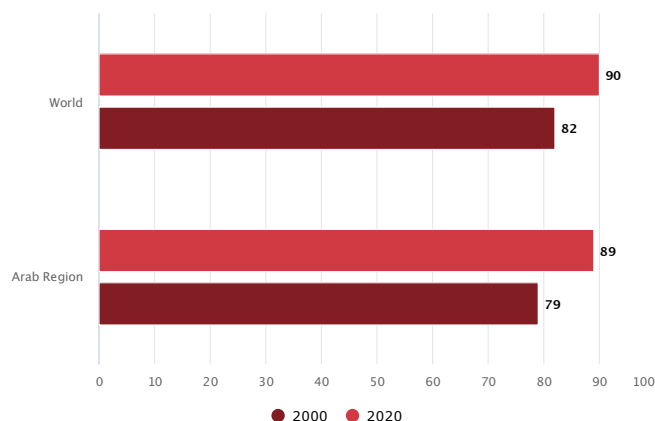
1.4.1 Population using basic sanitation services (Percentage)
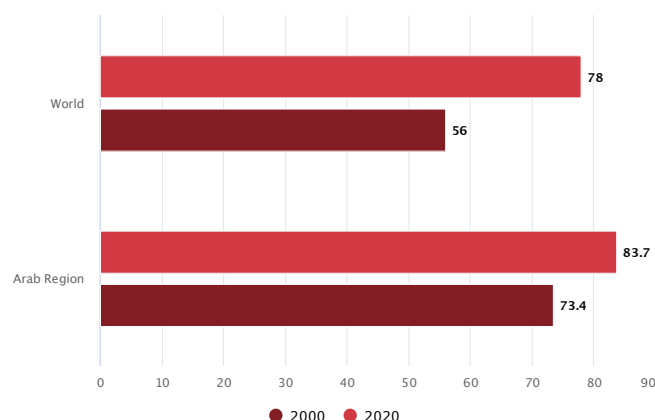
2 ZERO HUNGER

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

- Food security in the Arab region remains a persistent challenge. Undernourishment is above the world's average, and has been slightly on the rise since 2014. Stunting among children and anaemia among women are decreasing, but remain significantly high in the Arab LDCs. The percentage of overweight children continues to increase across the region, and is highest in the Mashreq.

- Following a visible spike in the Agriculture Orientation Index for Government Expenditure in GCC countries in the early 2000s, the Index has subsequently steadily decreased to below the world's average.

Data is unavailable for key indicators related to agricultural productivity and sustainability.

Evidence strength

43%

2.2.1 Prevalence of undernourishment (Percentage)

- ● Arab Region
- ● World
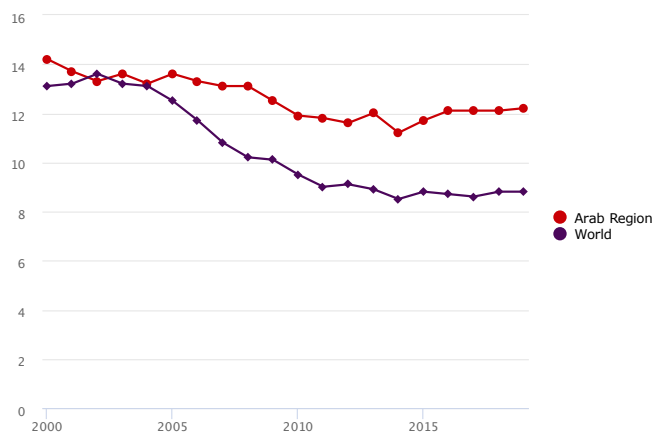
2.2.1 Stunted children (Percentage)

- ● Arab Region
- ● Arab_GCC
- ● Arab_LDC
- ● Arab_Maghreb
- ● Arab_Mashreq
- ● World
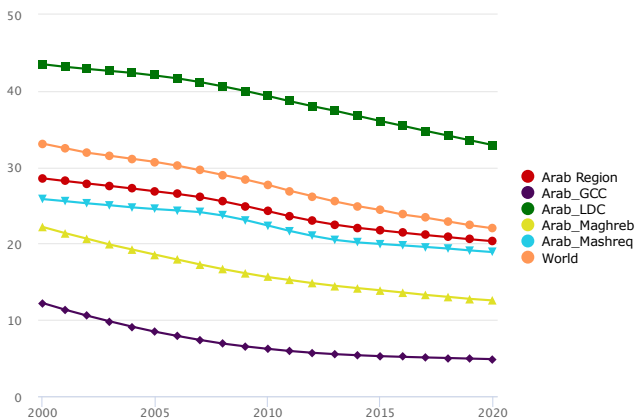
2.2.2. Overweight children (Percentage)

- ● Arab Region
- ● Arab_GCC
- ● Arab_LDC
- ● Arab_Maghreb
- ● Arab_Mashreq
- ● World
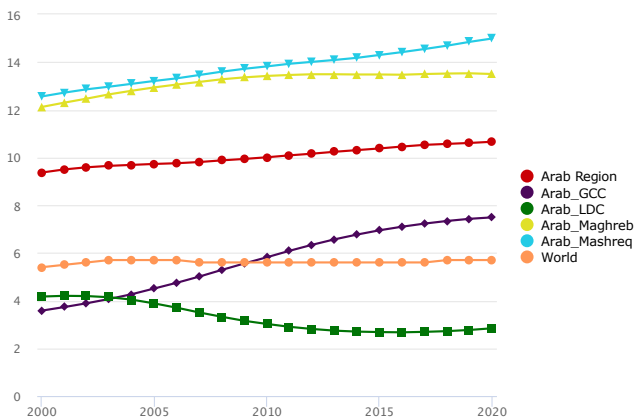
2.2.3 Women with anaemia (Percentage)
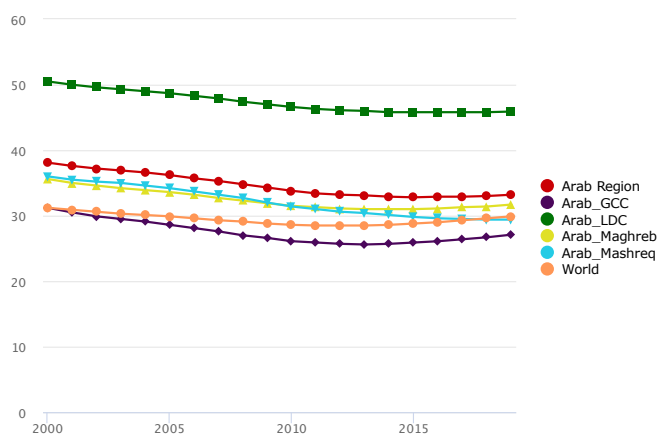
2.5.1 Number of stored plant genetic resources
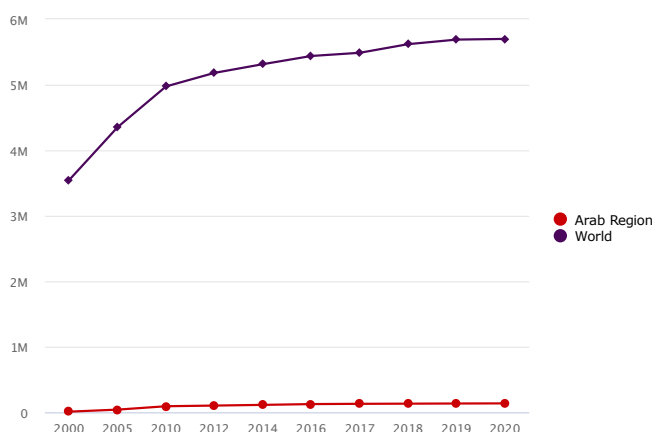
2.a.1 Agriculture orientation index for government expenditure
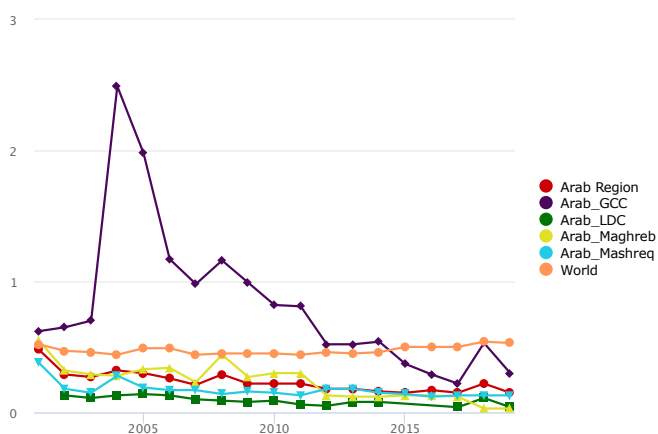
Note: The Agriculture Orientation Index for Government Expenditure is defined as the agriculture share of government expenditure, divided by the agriculture value added share of GDP.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Evidence
strength
75%

SDG 3 – Good health and wellbeing

- The region has made significant progress on many health-related indicators over the past decades, notably in terms of reducing under-five and maternal mortality rates, although significant disparities remain between subregions.

- Women's access to family planning methods is increasing fastest in the Arab LDCs, but remains well below the world's average.

- The region has underperformed compared with the world in reducing road traffic fatalities, which remain particularly high and on the increase in the Arab LDCs and GCC countries.

- Attainments under the International Health Regulations remain particularly low in the Arab LDCs.

Data availability for health-related indicators is relatively high, with few gaps relating to tobacco use and the health-care workforce.

3.1.1 Maternal mortality ratio (Per 100,000 live births)
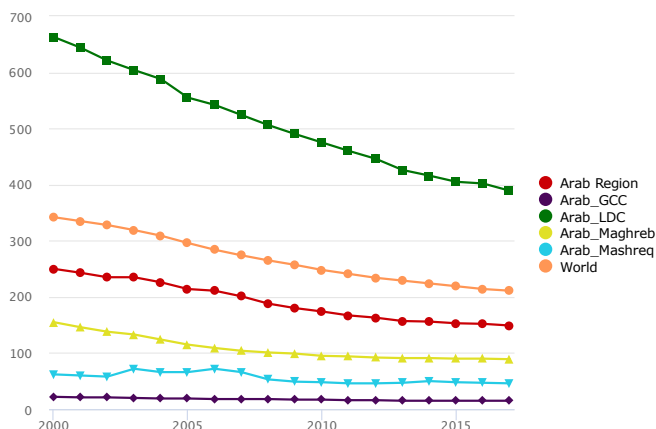
3.2.1 Under-five mortality rate (Per 1,000 live births)
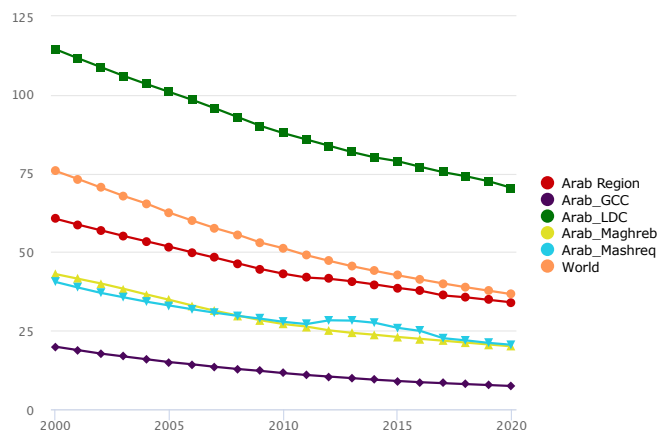
3.3.2 Tuberculosis incidence (Per 100,000 population)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- Arab_GCC
- Arab_LDC
- Arab_Maghreb
- Arab_Mashreq
- World
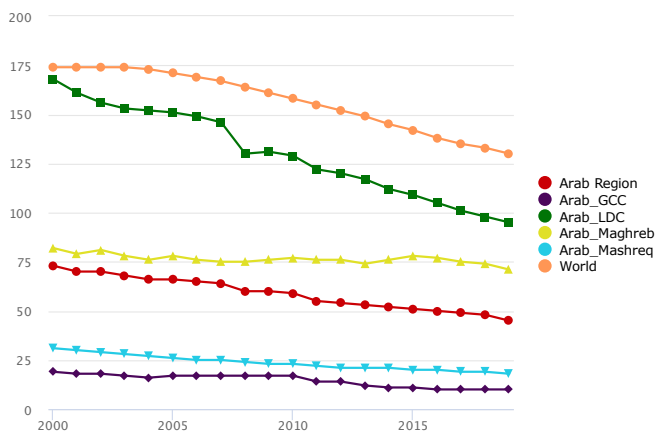
3.4.1 Mortality rate (Probability)

Legend:
- Arab Region (Both Sexes)
- Arab Region (Females)
- Arab Region (Males)
- World (Both Sexes)
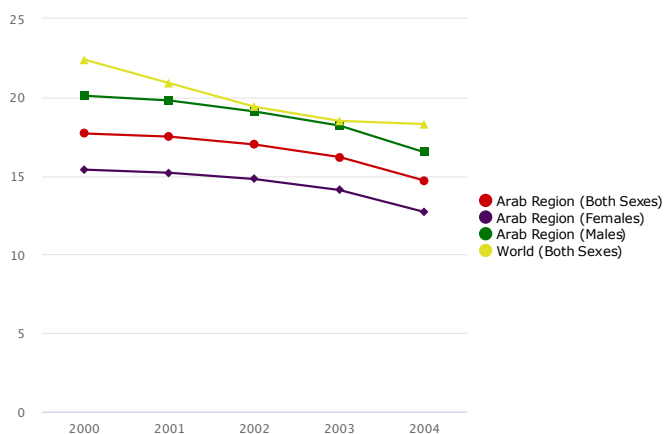
Note: Attributed to cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory disease.

3.6.1 Death rate due to road traffic injuries (Per 100,000 of the population)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- Arab_GCC
- Arab_LDC
- Arab_Maghreb
- Arab_Mashreq
- World
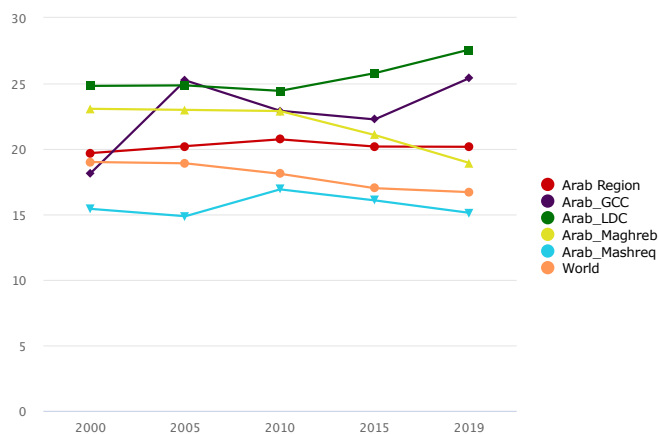
3.7.1 Women (15-49) with satisfied need for modern family planning methods (Percentage)
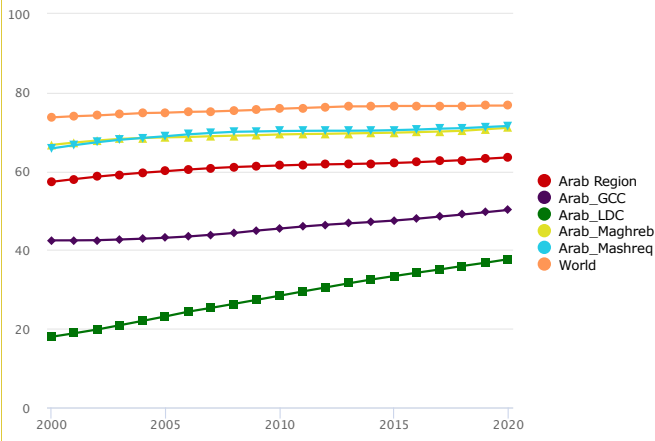
3.9.3 Mortality rate by unintentional poisoning (Per 100,000 of the population)
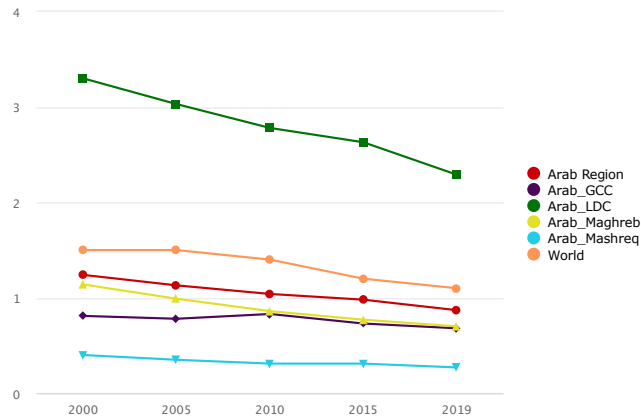
3.d.1 International health regulations capacity (Percentage)
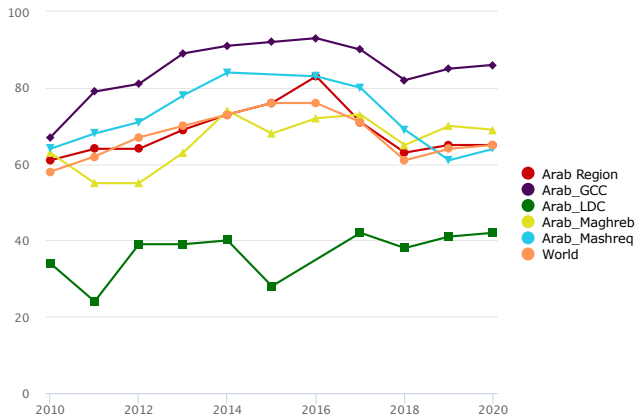
Note: International Health Regulations capacity reflects the percentage of attributes of 13 core capacities that have been attained at a specific point in time.

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Evidence strength

58%

SDG 4 – Quality education

- Since 2000, the region has seen steady improvements in secondary school enrolment for both sexes, but remains below the world's average. Despite visible improvements, the region continues to have a proportion of out-of-school children far exceeding the global average, and low rates of enrolment in pre-primary education.

- The region fares generally better than the world's average in terms of equipping its schools with electricity, Internet and drinking water.

- The proportion of primary school teachers with minimum qualifications is slightly above the world's average, notably for male.

Data gaps inhibit the ability to assess the region's progress in increasing educational attainment and learners' acquisition of skills and knowledge.

4.1x Secondary school enrollment (Percentage)

Arab Region (Both Sexes)
Arab Region (Females)
Arab Region (Males)
World (Both Sexes)
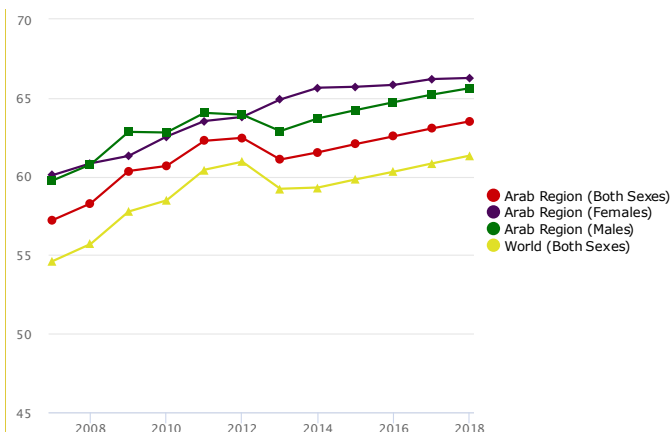
4.2x Children out of primary school (Percentage)

Arab Region (Both Sexes)
Arab Region (Females)
Arab Region (Males)
World (Both Sexes)
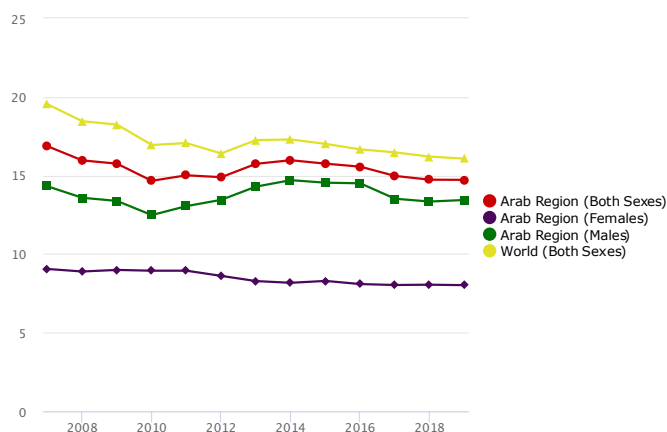
4.2.2 Participation rate in organized learning (Percentage)

- ● Arab Region (Both Sexes)
- ● Arab Region (Females)
- ● Arab Region (Males)
- ● World (Both Sexes)
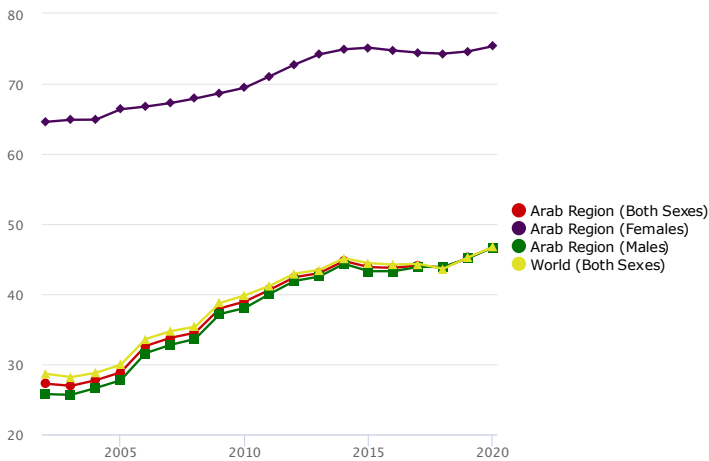
4.a.1 Lower secondary schools with access to internet, electricity, and drinking water (Percentage)

- ● 2015
- ● 2016
- ● 2017
- ● 2018
- ● 2019
- ● 2020
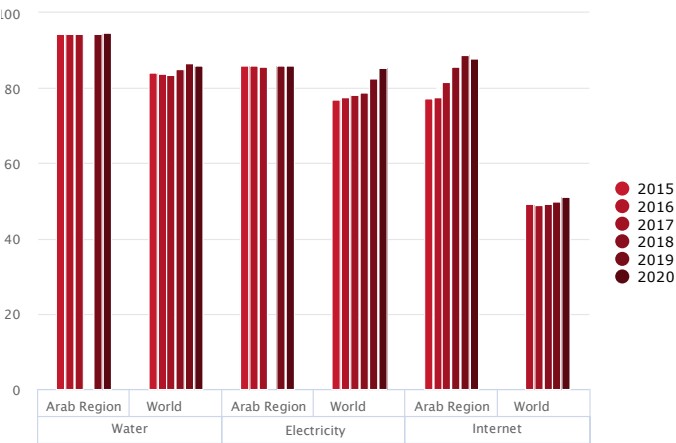
4.c.1 Teachers with minimum qualifications in primary education (Percentage)

- ● Arab Region (Both Sexes)
- ● Arab Region (Females)
- ● Arab Region (Males)
- ● World (Both Sexes)
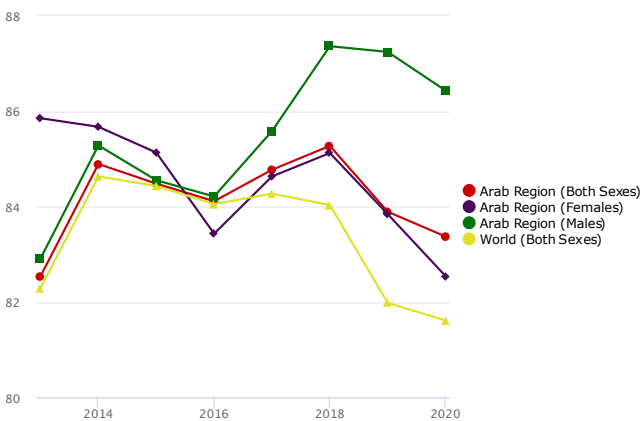
5 GENDER EQUALITY

Evidence strength

21%

SDG 5 – Gender equality

- The Arab region still has work to do to achieve gender equality and empower women and girls. The representation of women in elected local governments is steadily catching up with the world's average, but remains far from gender parity. However, no visible improvement can be seen in the rate of women in managerial positions, which remains far behind the world's average.

- Child marriage and female genital mutilation remain high, and the legal environment governing access to sexual and reproductive health care is below international standards across the region.

Data availability is notably weak, impeding the assessment of efforts to end discrimination, guarantee equal rights and access to resources, and eliminate violence against women and girls.

5.3.1 Married women or in a union before age of 18, 2020 (Percentage)

Arab_LDC	33.5
Arab Region	20.4
World	19.7
Arab_Mashreq	18.5
Arab_Maghreb	7.8
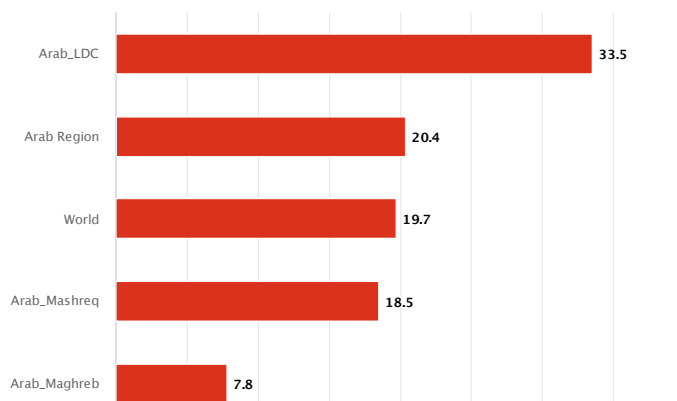
5.3.2 Women who have undergone female genital mutilation, 2020 (Percentage)

Arab_LDC (15–19)	63.8
Arab Region (15–19)	55.2
Arab_Mashreq (15–19)	48.2
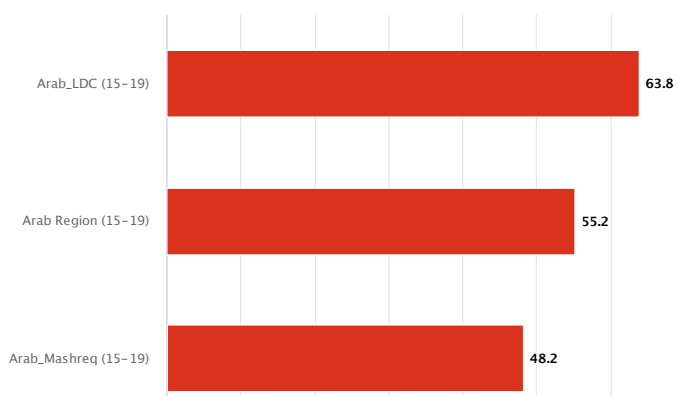
5.5.1 Elected seats held by women in local government (Percentage)

- Arab Region
- World
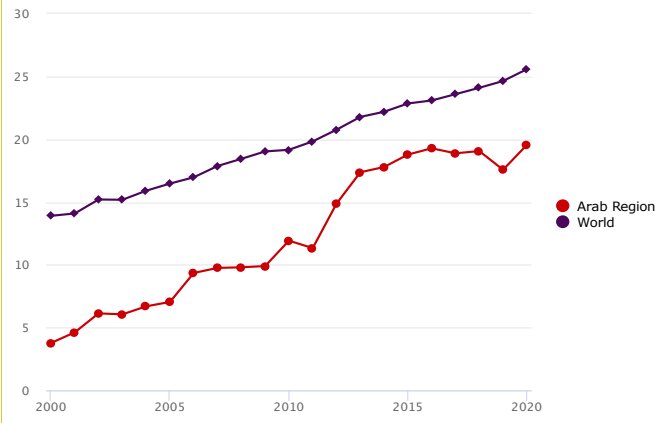
5.5.2 Women in managerial positions (Percentage)

- Arab Region
- World
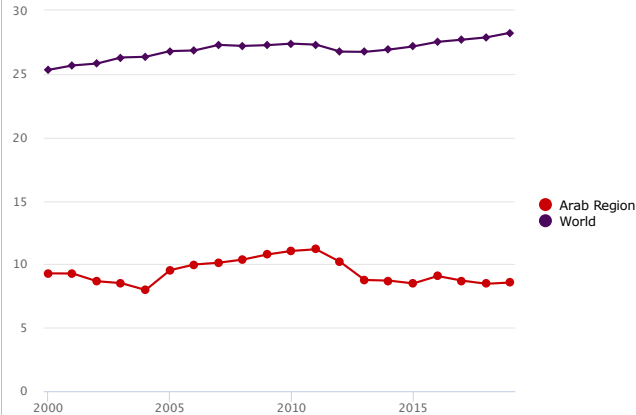
5.6.2 Laws for equal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, 2019 (Percentage)

World	73
Arab Region	54.6
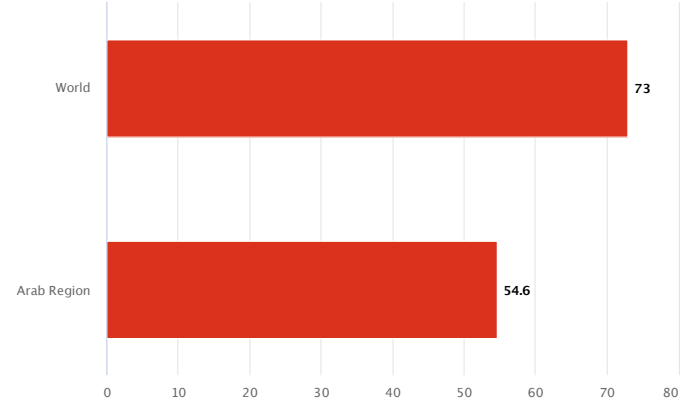
Note: Measures the extent to which countries have legal and regulatory environments across the following four thematic sections: maternity care; contraception and family planning; comprehensive sexuality education and information; and HIV and HPV.

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Evidence strength

36%

SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation

- The Arab region has registered important progress on indicators related to population access to safely managed water and sanitation services since the early 2000s. The practice of open defecation in rural areas of the region is decreasing, and is lower than the world's average for rural areas.

- The GCC subregion is implementing integrated water resources management to a higher degree than other subregions, and is making significant improvements in water use efficiency, which reflects a better ability to decouple economic growth from water use.

- The region needs to bring down freshwater withdrawals to a more sustainable level, and enhance water cooperation arrangements for transboundary basins.

Data gaps relate mainly to water quality, wastewater treatment, and the participation of local communities in water management.

6.1.1 Population using safely managed water (Percentage)
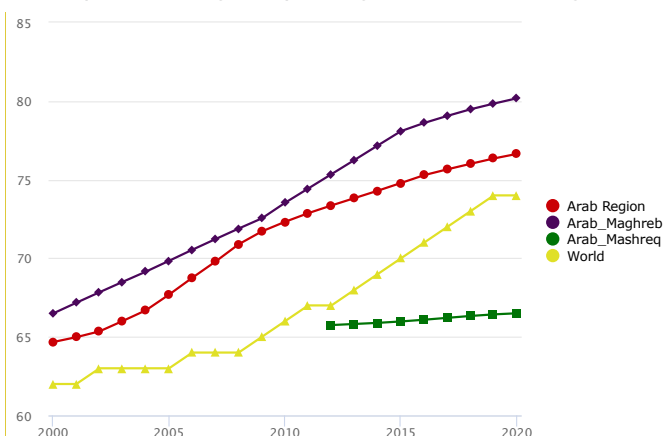
6.2.1 Population practicing open defecation (Percentage)
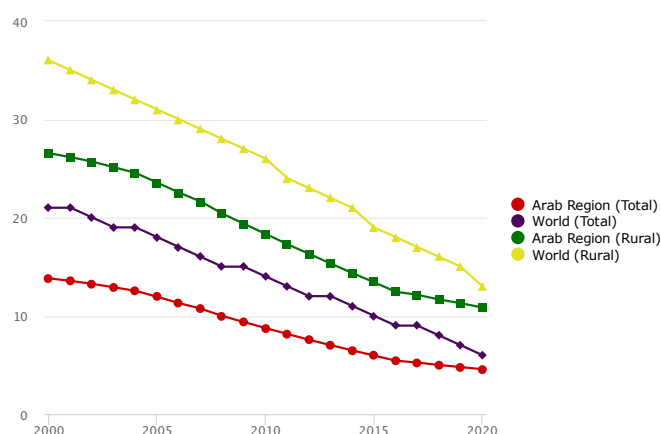
6.2.1 Population practicing open defecation, Arab LDCs, rural (Percentage)

Arab_LDC (Rural)
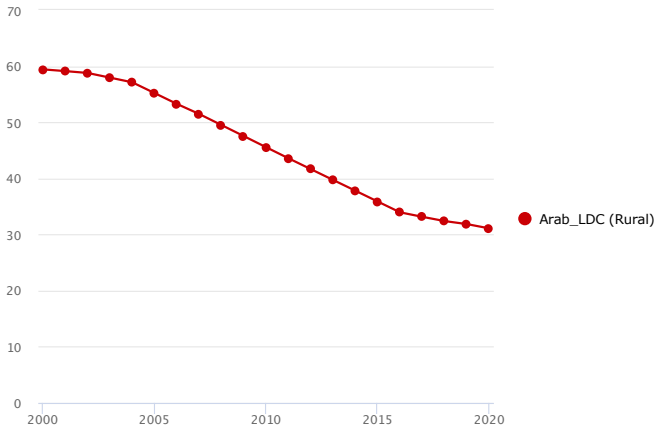
6.2.1 Population using safely managed sanitation services (Percentage)

Arab Region
World
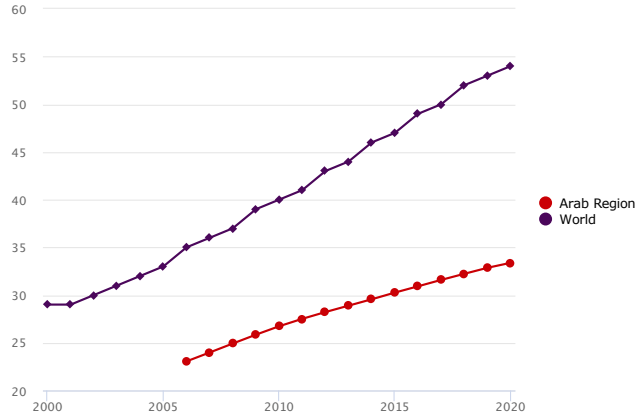
6.4.1 Water use efficiency, 2018 (USD/m³)

Arab Region	10.92
Arab_GCC	43.83
Arab_LDC	2.81
Arab_Maghreb	10.09
Arab_Mashreq	4.97
World	19.36
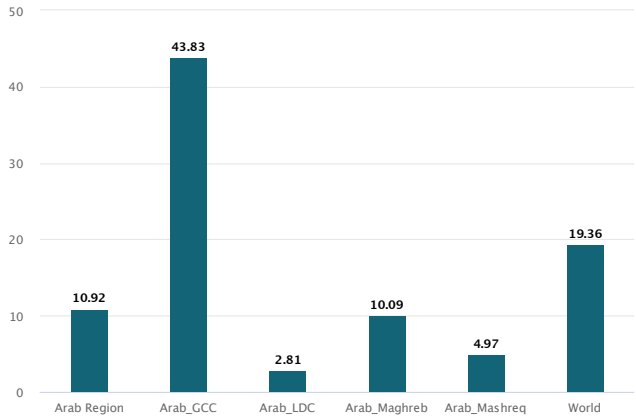
6.4.2 Freshwater withdrawal (Percentage)
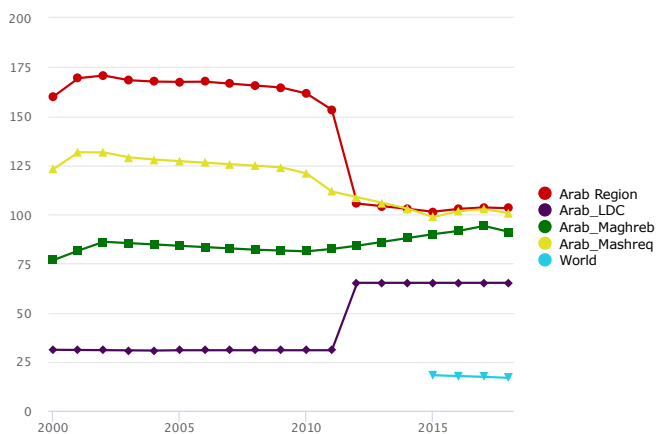
6.5.1 Degree of integrated water resources management implementation (Percentage)
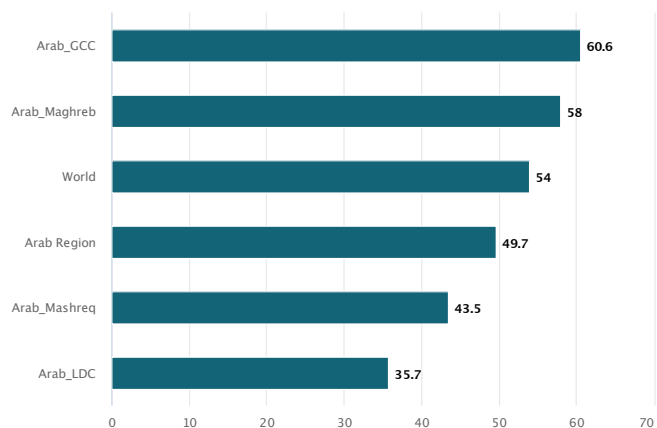
6.5.2 Transboundary basins with operational arrangement for water cooperation, 2020 (Percentage)

Evidence strength

67%
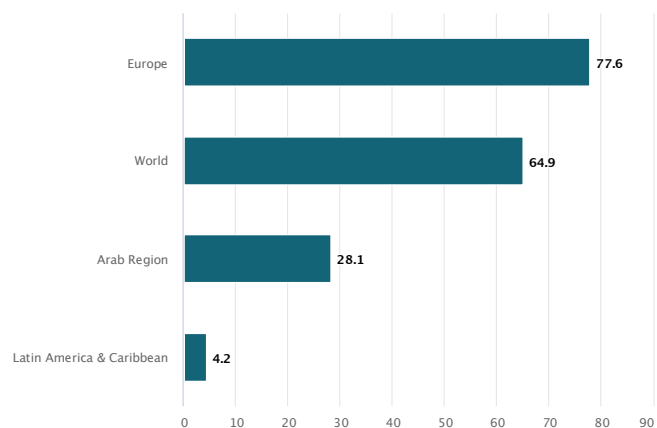
SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy

- Since 2000, the Arab region has made significant progress in extending access to electricity and clean fuels. However, the region appears to be struggling to increase the share of renewable energy in the total final energy consumption and in installed renewable electricity-generating capacity per capita, both of which remain well below the world's averages. This could be partially attributed to weak international financial flows into the region in support of clean energy.

- No significant improvement has been registered in the region's energy intensity since 2000.

Data availability for energy-related indicators is relatively high.

7.1.1 Population with access to electricity by location (Percentage)
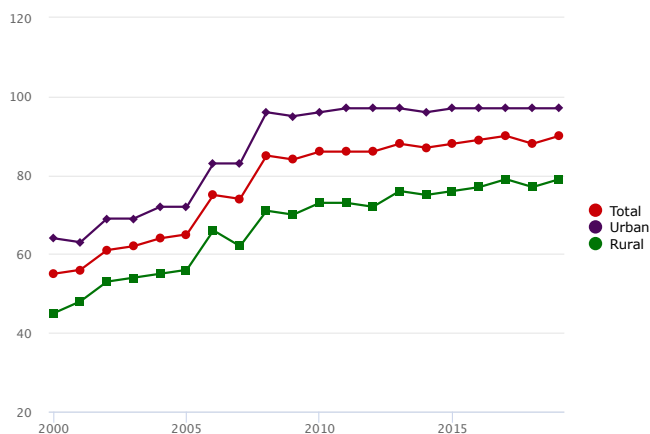
7.1.2 Population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology (Percentage)
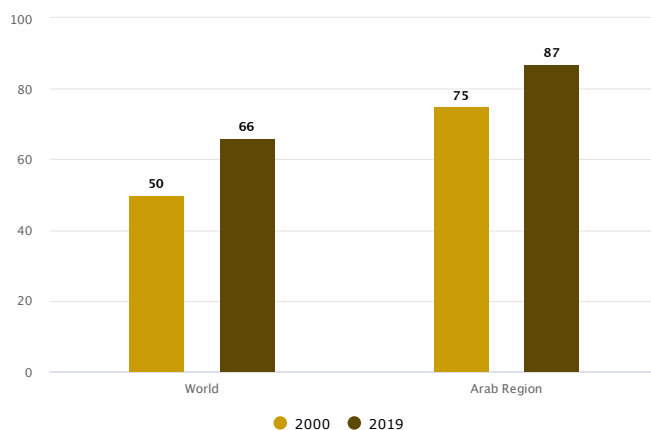
7.2.1 Renewable energy share in final energy consumption (Percentage)
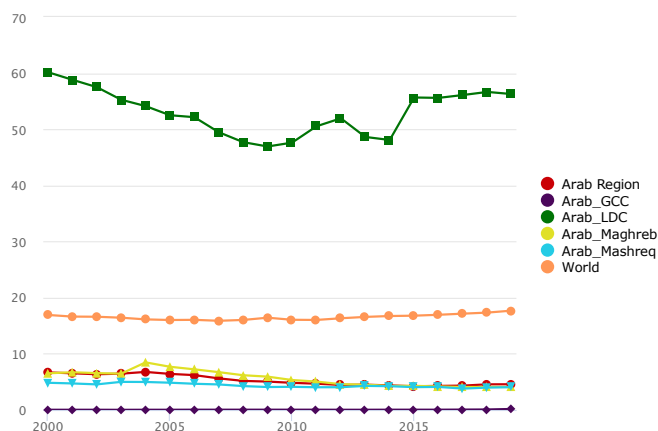
7.3.1 Energy intensity level of primary energy (Megajoules per constant 2011 PPP GDP)
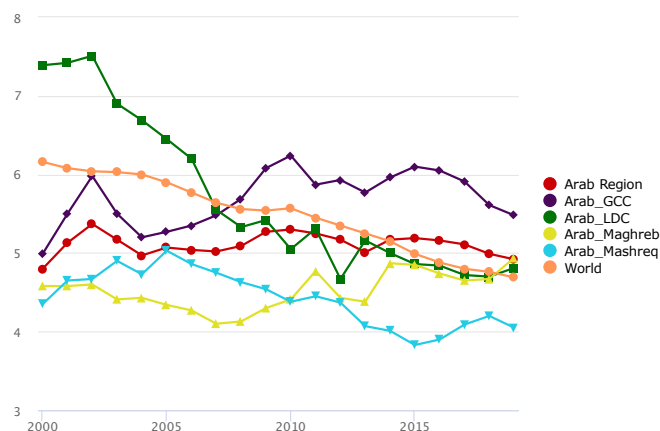
7.a.1 International financial flows into clean energy (Millions of dollars)
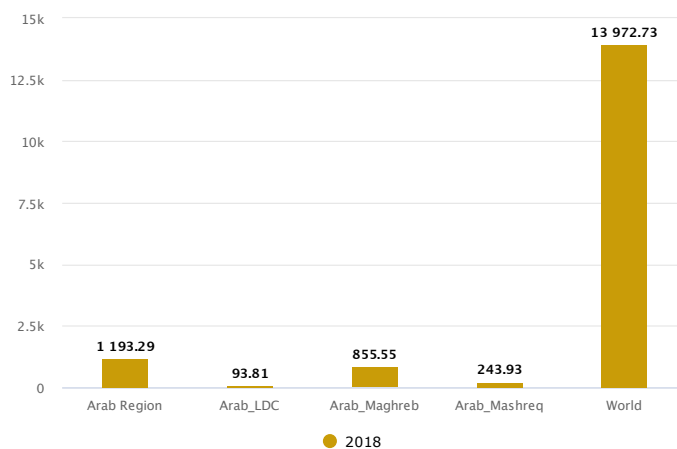
7.b.1 Installed renewable electricity-generated capacity (Watts per capita)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- Arab_GCC
- Arab_LDC
- Arab_Maghreb
- Arab_Mashreq
- World

SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth
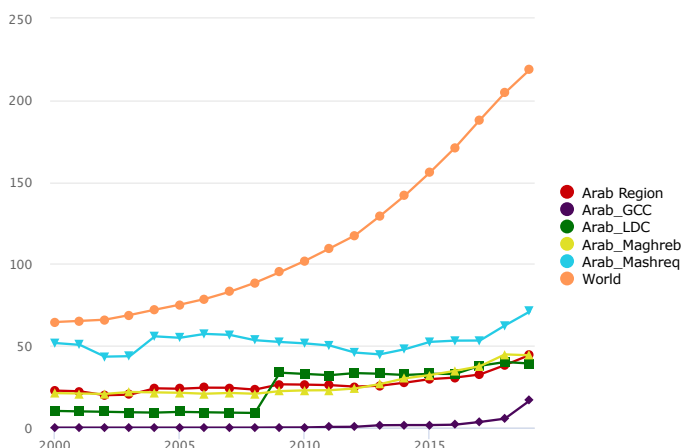
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Evidence strength

50%

- Low levels of economic growth, over reliance on oil, and the dominance of low-productivity sectors have distorted the region's labour market, which has failed to meet demand for productive employment and decent work.

- Employment remains a major challenge for the region, especially for women and young people. For example, women in the region aged 15-24 are over three times as likely to be unemployed as their counterparts worldwide.

- The region has an overall low level of account ownership compared with the world's average, resulting in low levels of financial inclusion, notably for young people, women, persons with primary education and the poor.

Data is largely available for this Goal, with some gaps relating to informal employment and child labour, among others.

8.1.1 Economic growth (Percentage)

Bar chart values:
- Arab Region: −117
- World: −31
- Arab_Mashreq: 35
- Arab_GCC: −192
- Arab_LDC: −93
- Arab_Maghreb: 133

● 2015-2019
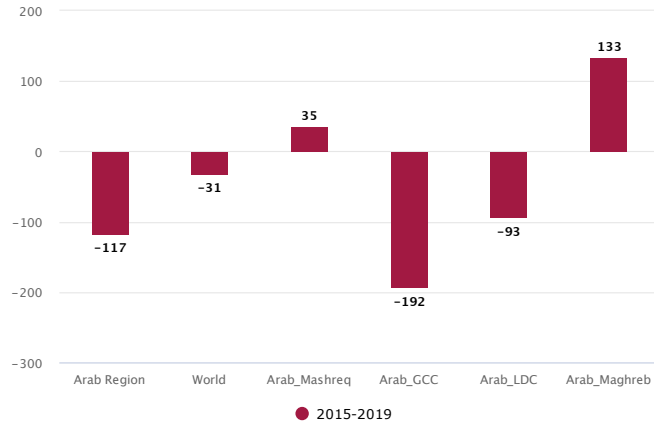
8.2.1 Labour productivity (Percentage)

Bar chart values:
- Arab Region: −147
- World: −32
- Arab_Mashreq: −22
- Arab_GCC: −433
- Arab_LDC: 43
- Arab_Maghreb: −87

● 2015-2019

8.5.2 Unemployment, 2019 (Percentage)

15+
- World: Total 5.4, Male 5.3, Female 5.5
- Arab Region: Total 10.2, Male 7.7, Female 19.9

15–24
- World: Total 13.9, Male 13.9, Female 13
- Arab Region: Total 25.7, Male 21.4, Female 41.9
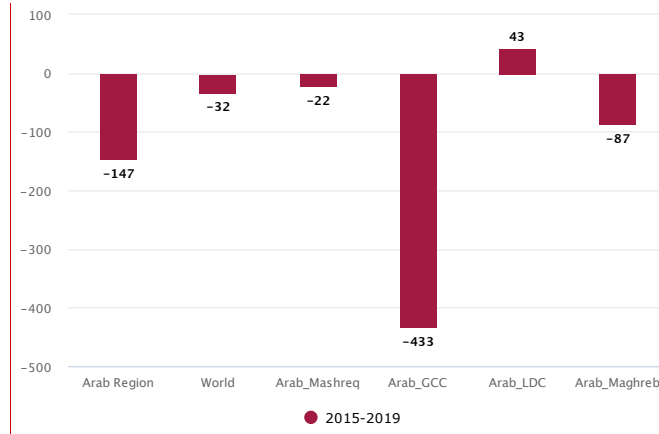
Legend:
● Total
● Male
● Female
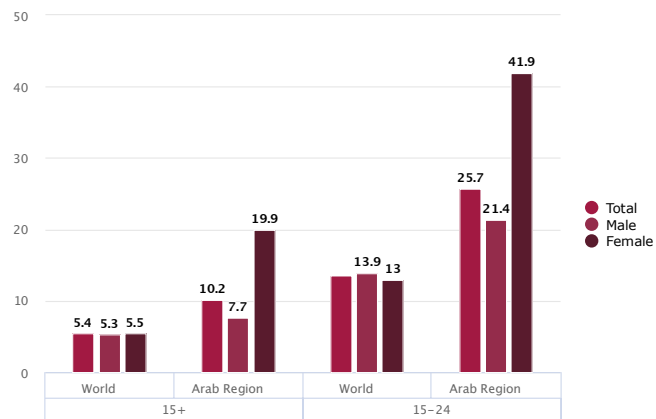
8.6.1 Youth not in education, employment or training (Percentage)

	Male	Female	Total
World	14	31.1	22.3
Arab Region	17.7	42.4	29.7

● Male ● Female ● Total

8.8.2 Labour rights

Arab_Maghreb	3.43
World	5.01
Arab Region	7.66
Arab_Mashreq	9.25
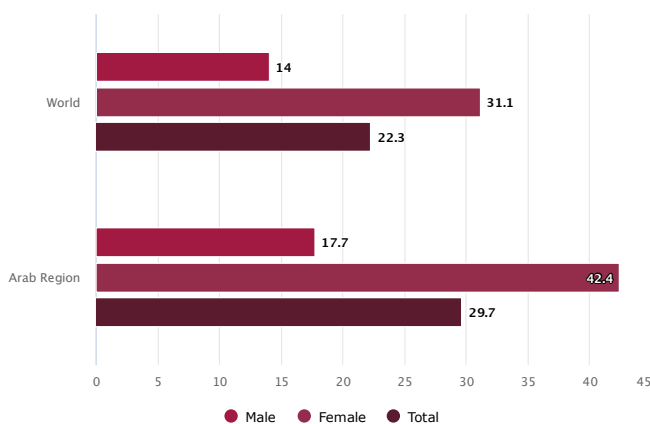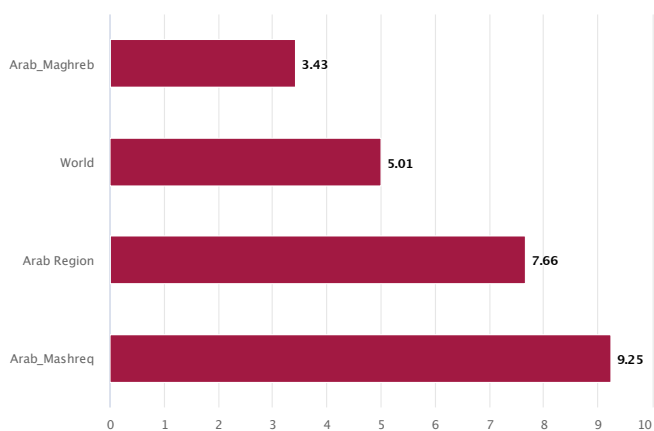
Note: Reflects the level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization (ILO) textual sources and national legislation.

8.10.1 Number of automated teller machines (Per 100,000 persons)

Arab_LDC	7.8
Arab_Mashreq	18.5
Arab_Maghreb	19.1
Arab Region	23.7
Arab_GCC	61.9
World	67.3
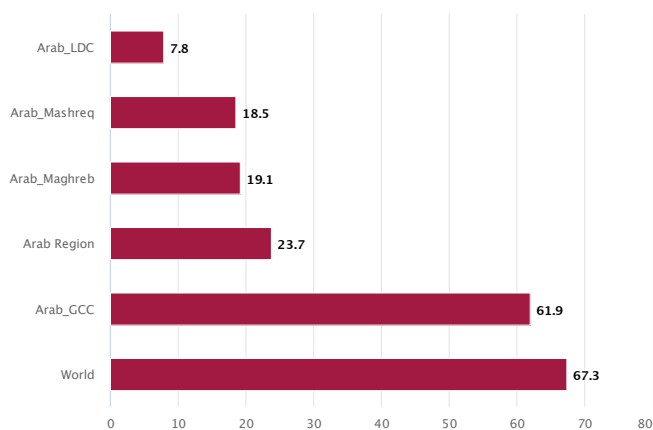
8.10.2 Account ownership (Percentage)
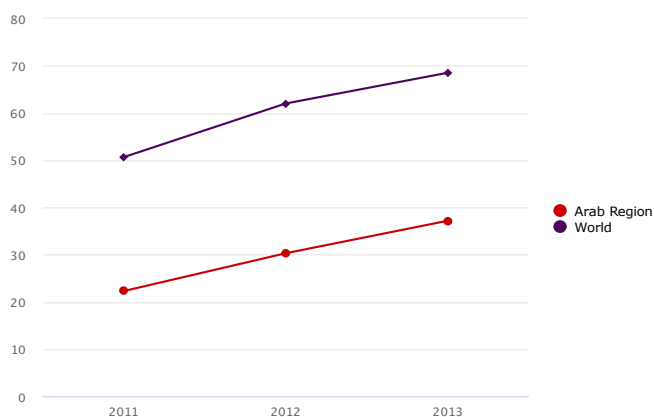
Note: Proportion of adults with an account at a financial institution or a mobile-money-service provider (15 years and older).

8.10.2 Account ownership in the Arab region, 2017 (Percentage)
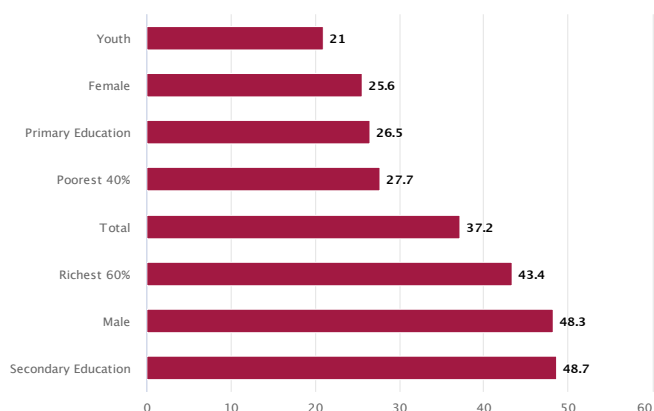
Note: Account ownership at a financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider.

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Evidence strength
67%

- The Arab region has yet to shift towards sustainable and inclusive industrialization, and to fully reap the benefits of the knowledge economy. Despite minor improvements since 2000, the region's manufacturing sector remains less productive and more polluting than the world's averages, and generates fewer jobs.

- Access of small-scale industrial enterprises to financial services varies across the region, and is particularly low in the Mashreq and the Arab LDCs.

- The region exhibits low value addition in medium- and high-tech industries, and low levels of researchers and research and development expenditures.
- Access to at least a 3G mobile network has been visibly increasing, in line with global growth rates.

Data availability for this Goal is relatively high.

9.2.1 Manufacturing value added (Percentage)
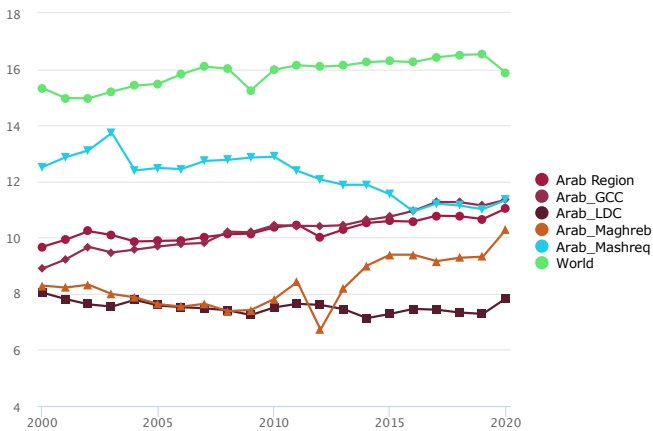
9.2.2 Manufacturing employment, 2019 (Percentage)
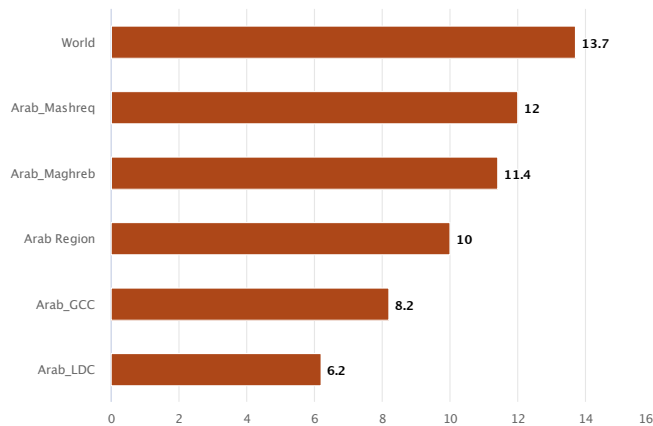
9.3.2 Small-scale industries with loans or credit, 2020 (Percentage)

Region	Value
Arab_Maghreb	23.6
Arab Region	15.4
Arab_Mashreq	14.2
Arab_LDC	12.6
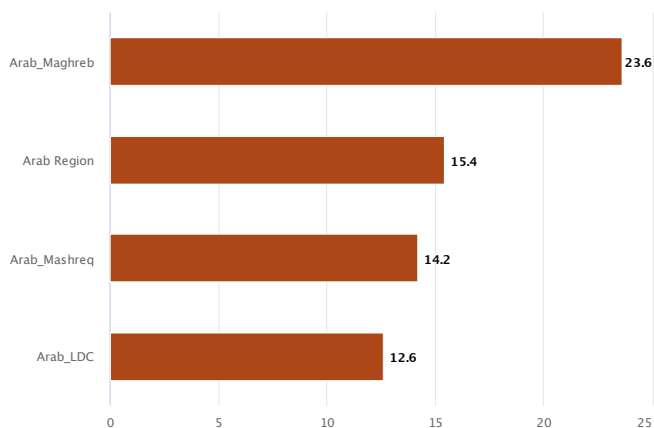
9.4.1 Carbon dioxide emissions per unit of manufacturing value added (Kgs of CO_2/constant 2015 USD)

Region	Value
Arab_GCC	1.55
Arab Region	1.21
Arab_Mashreq	0.79
Arab_Maghreb	0.74
World	0.43
Arab_LDC	0.28
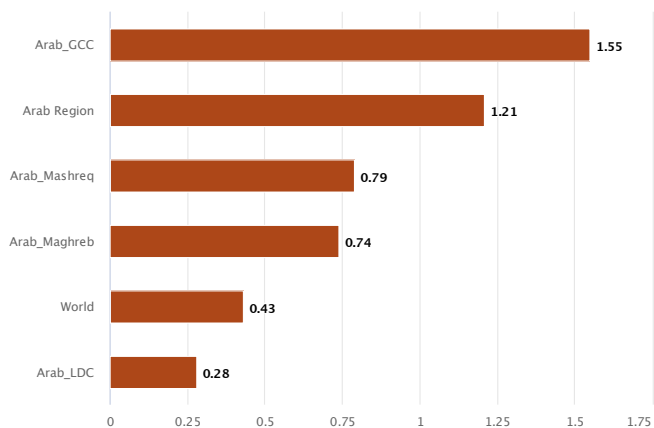
9.5.1 Research and development expenditure as a proportion of GDP (Percentage)

	2000	2018
Arab Region	0.46	0.65
World	1.51	1.73
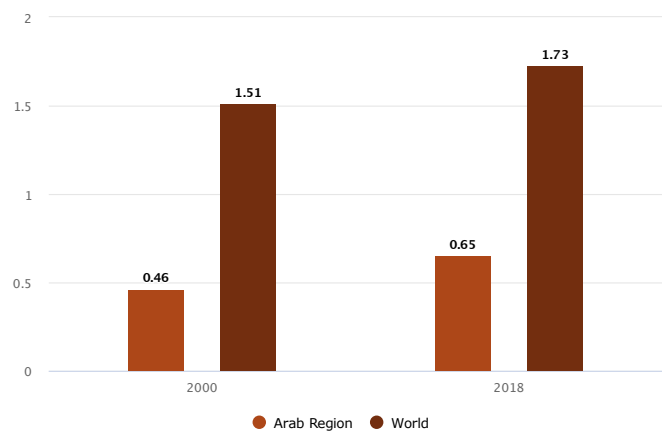
9.5.2 Researchers (Per 1,000,000 population)

Legend:
- ● Arab Region
- ● World
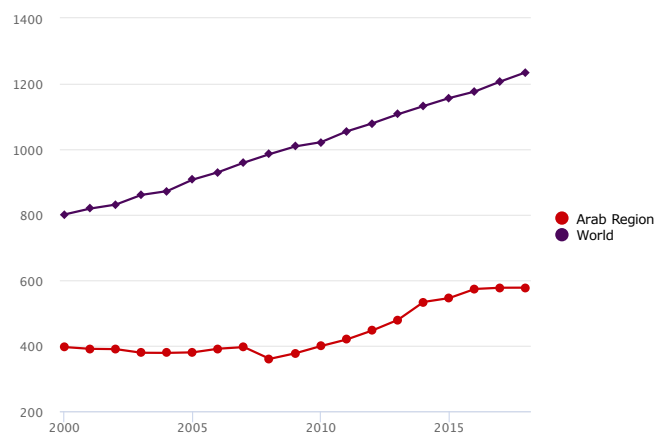
9.b.1 Value added of medium- and high-tech industry (Percentage)

Legend:
- ● Arab Region
- ● Arab_GCC
- ● Arab_LDC
- ● Arab_Maghreb
- ● Arab_Mashreq
- ● World
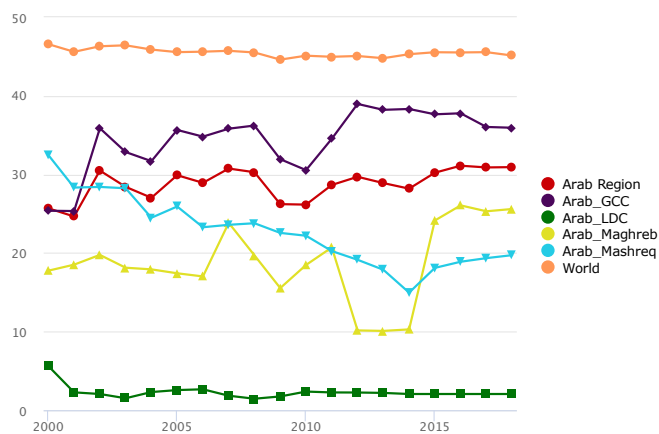
9.c.1 Population with access to at least a 3G mobile network (Percentage)

Legend:
- ● Arab Region
- ● World

10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES

Evidence strength

21%
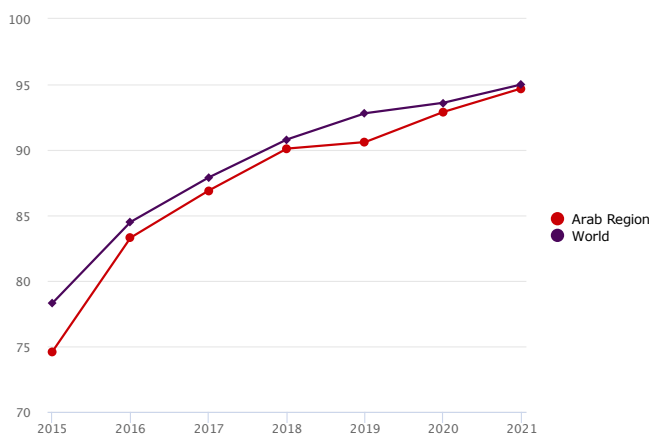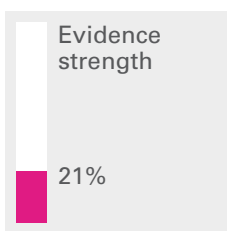
SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities

- The Arab region exhibited insignificant change in the compensation of employees as a share of GDP, which remains well below the world's averages, signifying that there were little improvements in the personal income of households.

- Refugees originating from the Arab region have increased visibly over the past 10 years, and constitute a large proportion of its population.

- Remittances received by Arab countries continue to constitute a higher share of GDP compared with the world's average.

- The region's share of official development assistance (ODA) has fluctuated over the years, hovering at around a fifth of the world's ODA in recent years.

Data availability for this Goal is low, with data gaps relating to economic inclusion, discrimination and migration.

10.4.1 Labour share of GDP (Percentage)

World
51.4
53.7

Arab Region
35
34.5

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

● 2004   ● 2017
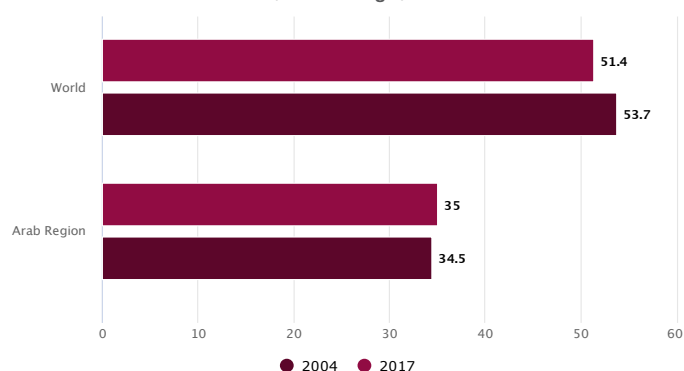
10.7.4 Refugees (Per 100,000 population)

● Arab Region
● World
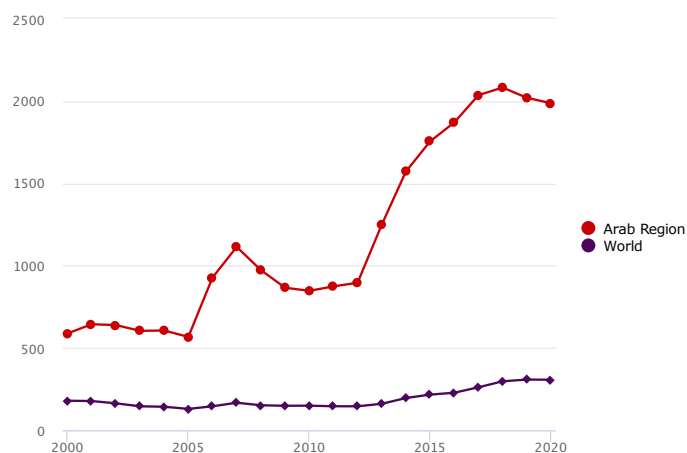
10.b.1x Net official development assistance and official aid received (Constant 2018 US$ billion)
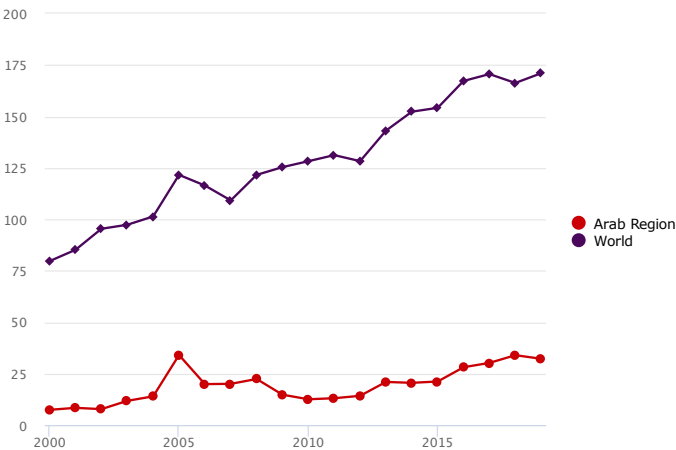
- Arab Region
- World

10.c.x Personal remittances, received (Percentage of GDP)
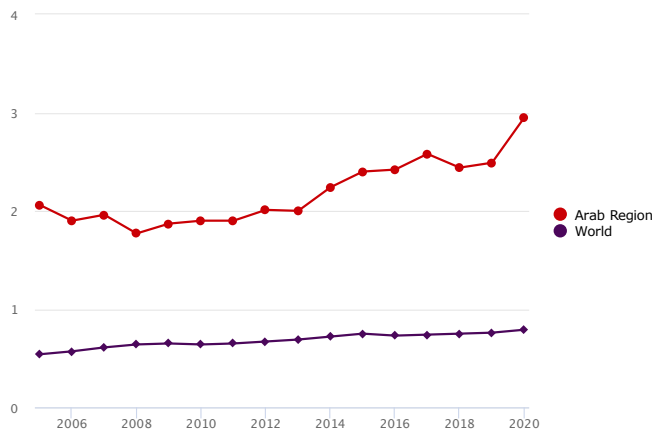
- Arab Region
- World

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Evidence strength

36%

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities

- Increasing and unplanned urbanization in the Arab region has given rise to a variety of challenges. The proportion of the urban population living in slums has increased sharply since 2000, as has urban pollution, both of which exceed the world's average.

- The number of internally displaced persons owing to disasters has increased visibly over the past 10 years, but remains insignificant compared with the world's averages.

Data is missing for the majority of SDG 11 indicators, including those related to inclusivity, sustainable transport systems, waste management, public space, and urban-rural linkages.

11.1.1 Urban population living in slums (Percentage)
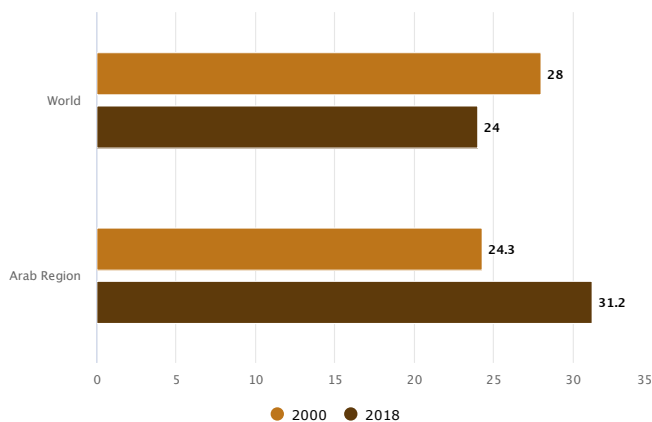
World
- 2000: 28
- 2018: 24

Arab Region
- 2000: 24.3
- 2018: 31.2

● 2000 ● 2018

11.5.1x Internally displaced persons associated with disasters (Per 100,000 new cases of displaced persons)

Arab Region
- 1.3
- 2
- 8.9

World
- 382.4
- 191.9
- 248

● 2008 ● 2015 ● 2019
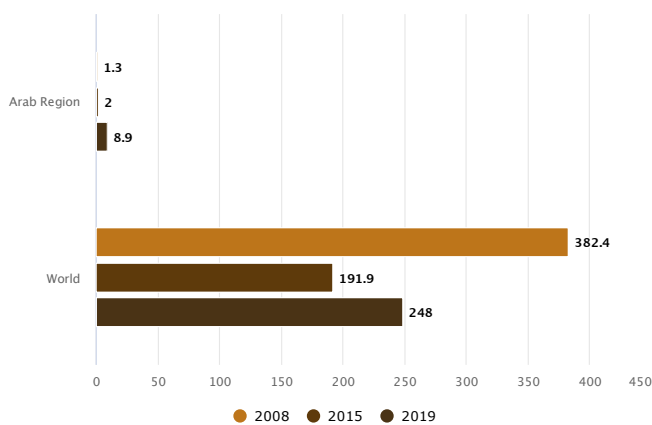
11.6.2   Fine particulate matter in cities (Mgr/m^3)
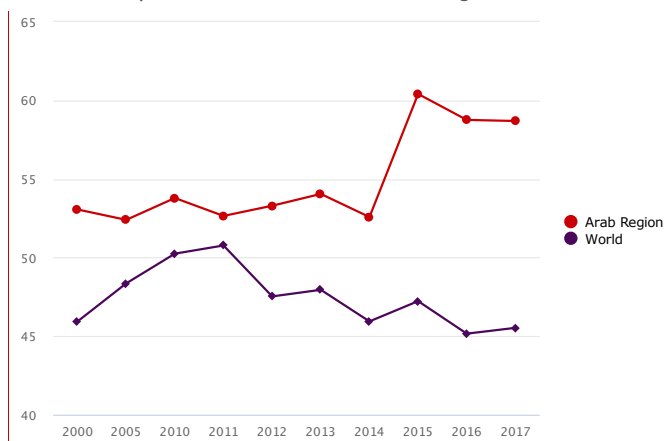
● Arab Region
● World

12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

SDG 12 – Responsible consumption and production

- Except for the GCC subregion, the material footprint in the Arab region is below the world's average, as is electronic waste generation per capita. However, the region continues to post high rates of food waste relative to the world.
- The region subsidizes fossil fuel consumption at nearly five times the global average.
- Reporting on hazardous waste as per international conventions is particularly low in the Arab LDCs, and very few companies in the region publish sustainability reports.

SDG 12 suffers from low data coverage in the region, with no data available on recycling, policy instruments supporting the shift to sustainable consumption and production, sustainable public procurement policies, and tourism sustainability.

Evidence strength

15%

12.2.1 Material footprint (Metric tons per person)

Legend: Arab Region, Arab_GCC, Arab_LDC, Arab_Maghreb, Arab_Mashreq, World
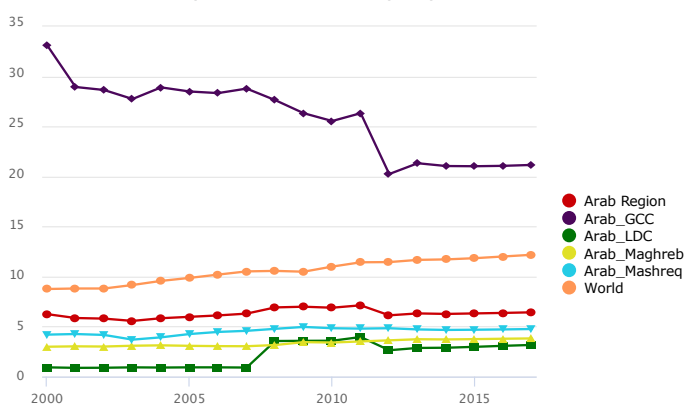
12.3.1 Food waste per capita, 2019 (Kg)

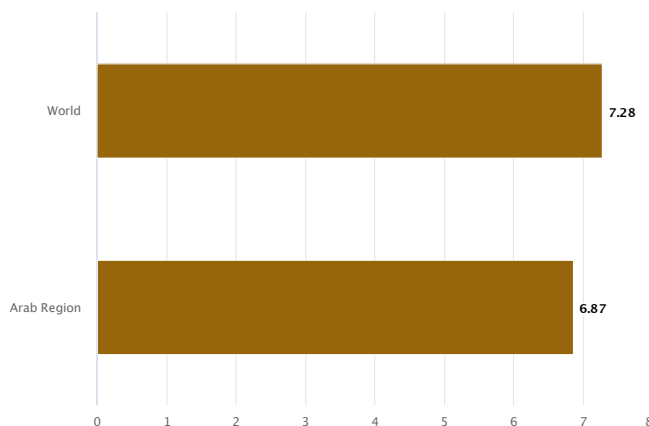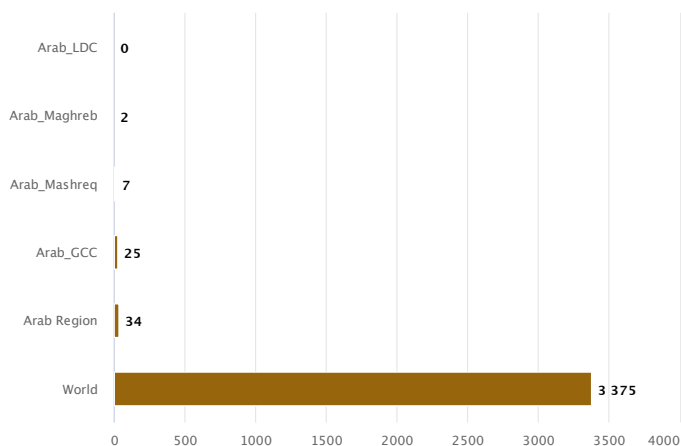|	Retail	Out-of-Home Consumption	Manufacturing	Households
World	16	31	51	73
Arab_Maghreb	16	27	52	90
Arab Region	16	27	52	100
Arab_LDC	16	27	52	101
Arab_GCC	17	26	56	103
Arab_Mashreq	16	27	52	104
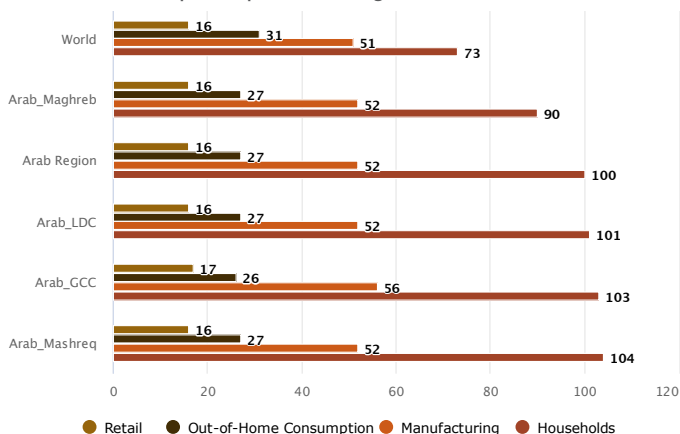
12.4.1 Parties to Basel convention transmitting information on hazardous waste, and other chemicals (Percentage)
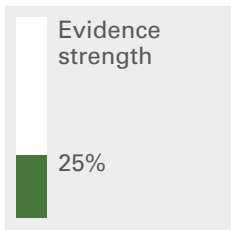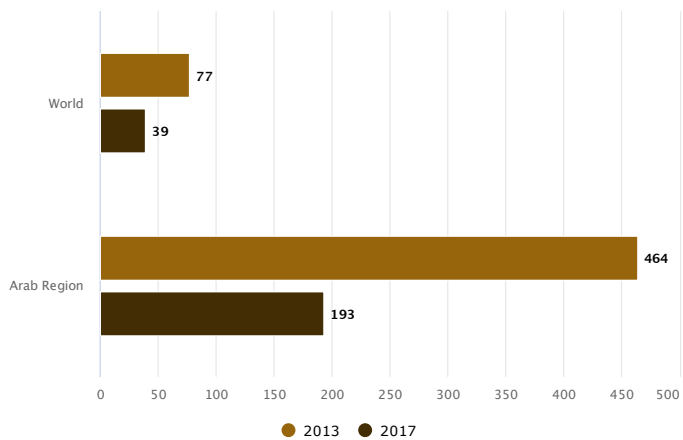
Region	Value
World (2015)	57.5
World (2020)	60.7
Arab Region (2015)	49.2
Arab Region (2020)	63.6

● 2015 ● 2020
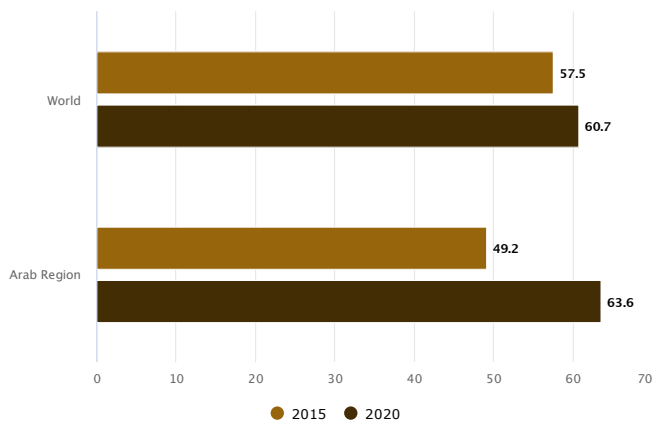
12.4.2 Electronic waste generated, per capita, 2020 (Kg)

Region	Value
World	7.28
Arab Region	6.87

12.6.1 Number of companies publishing sustainability reports, 2020

Region	Value
Arab_LDC	0
Arab_Maghreb	2
Arab_Mashreq	7
Arab_GCC	25
Arab Region	34
World	3 375

12.c.1   Fossil fuel pre-tax subsidies per capita (USD)

Arab Region
- 464 (2013)
- 193 (2017)

World
- 77 (2013)
- 39 (2017)

Legend: ● 2013   ● 2017

---

13 CLIMATE ACTION

Evidence strength

25%

SDG 13 – Climate action

- Per capita CO_2 emissions in the region continues to hover around global averages.
- The share of renewable energy in total consumption is decreasing, and remains well below the world's average.
- The number of internally displaced persons owing to disasters has increased visibly over the past 10 years, but remains insignificant compared with the world's averages.

Very few indicators are available at the regional level for SDG 13. Data is unavailable to fully assess the impact of disasters and the adoption of disaster risk reduction strategies as per the Sendai Framework, and the extent to which Arab countries have integrated climate change into national policies.

13.1x Internally displaced persons associated with disasters
(Per 100,000 new cases of displaced persons)

Arab Region
- 1.3 (2008)
- 2 (2015)
- 8.9 (2019)

World
- 382.4 (2008)
- 191.9 (2015)
- 248 (2019)

Legend: ● 2008   ● 2015   ● 2019
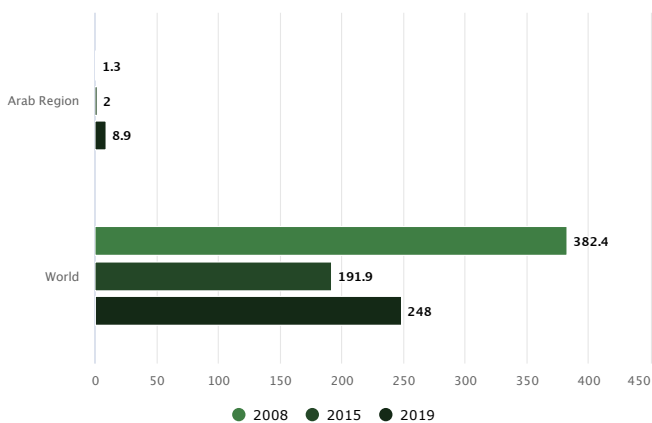
13.2x CO$_2$ Emissions (Metric tons per capita)
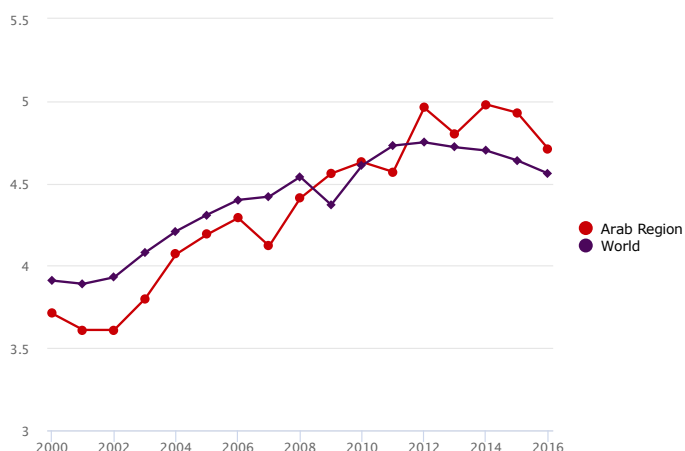
● Arab Region
● World

13.2x Renewable energy share (Percentage)
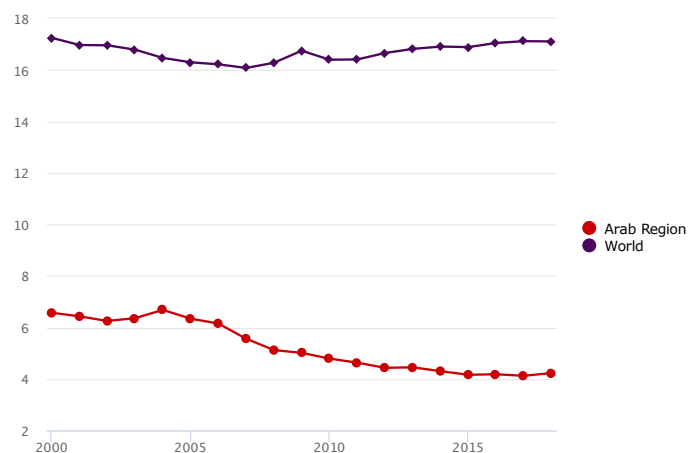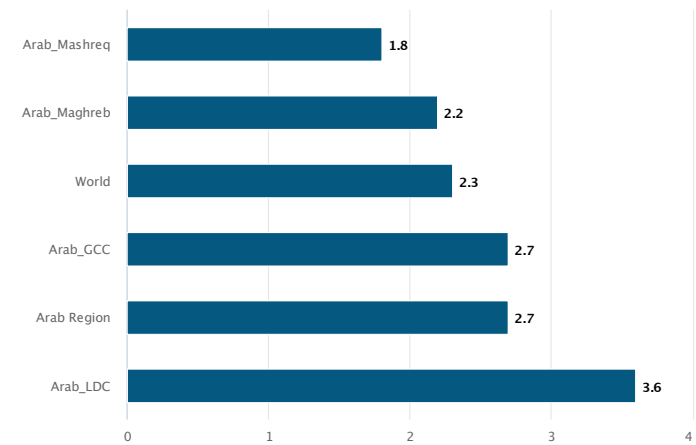

● Arab Region
● World

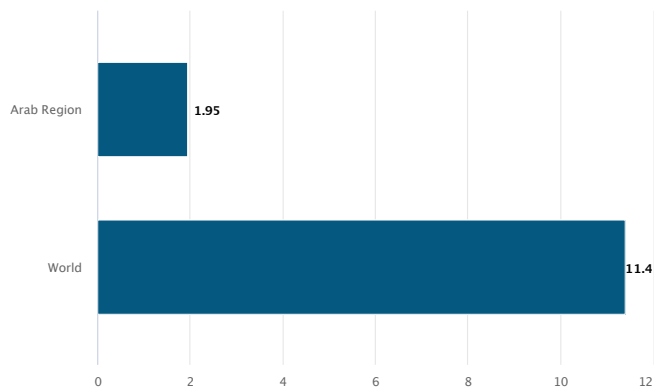**14 LIFE BELOW WATER**

SDG 14 – Life below water

- Marine areas in the Arab region are under threat, with relatively high levels of pollution and few protected marine areas.

- The region has made significant progress in recognizing and protecting access rights for small-scale fisheries, exceeding the world's average.

SDG 14 is among the least tracked Goals in the Arab region, with data largely lacking on the health of marine ecosystems and the implementation of sustainable fishing practices.

Evidence strength

10%

14.1.1 Chlorophyll-a anomaly, 2020 (Percentage)

Arab_Mashreq	1.8
Arab_Maghreb	2.2
World	2.3
Arab_GCC	2.7
Arab Region	2.7
Arab_LDC	3.6

14.5.1x Marine protected areas, 2018 (Percentage of territorial waters)

Arab Region	1.95
World	11.4

14.b.1 Degree of protection of access rights for small-scale fisheries

	2018	2020
World	3	4
Arab Region	4	5

● 2018 ● 2020
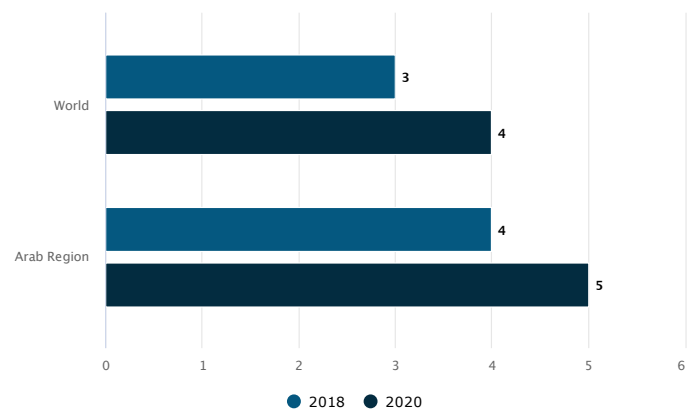
Note: Composite indicator calculated on the basis of country efforts to implement selected key provisions of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. Level of implementation: 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

15 LIFE ON LAND

Evidence strength

57%
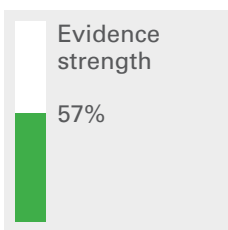
SDG 15 – Life on land

- The Arab region appears to be maintaining its naturally low forest areas, although a slight loss in forest area has been registered in the Arab LDCs. The region is improving in the adoption of long-term forest management plans, driven mainly by progress in the Maghreb, while the Mashreq registers no such plans.

- Although a low proportion of the region's land area is designated as protected compared with the world, it has high participation in international treaties to protect plant genetic resources.

There are notable data gaps for SDG 15, including indicators related to desertification, land degradation and biodiversity.

15.1.1 Forest area (Percentage)

Legend: Arab Region, Arab_GCC, Arab_LDC, Arab_Maghreb, Arab_Mashreq, World
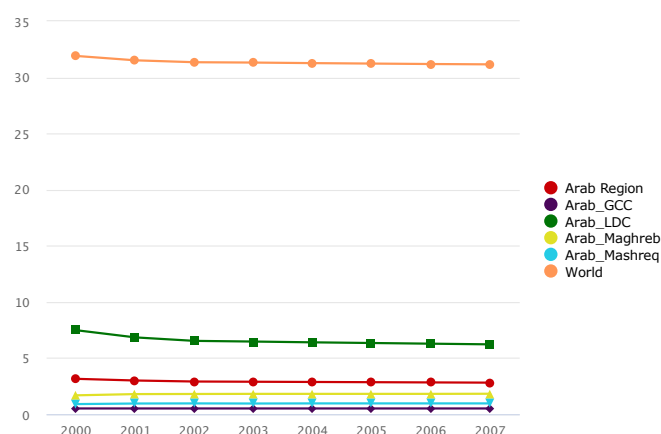
15.1.2x Terrestrial protected areas, 2018 (Percentage)

Arab Region 5.8

World 14.7
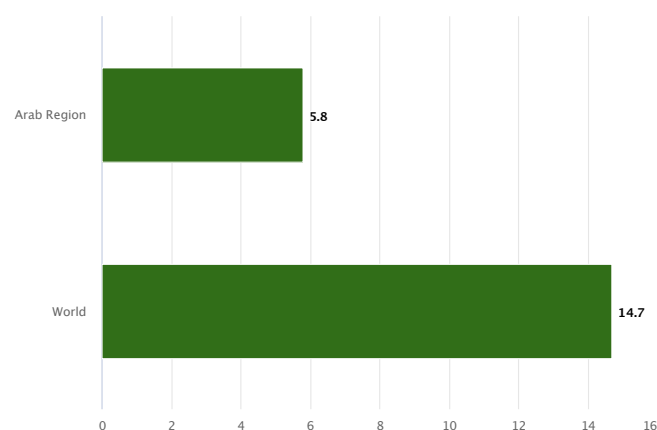
15.2.1 Forest area with a long-term management plans (Percentage)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- World
- Arab_LDC
- Arab_Maghreb
- Arab_Mashreq
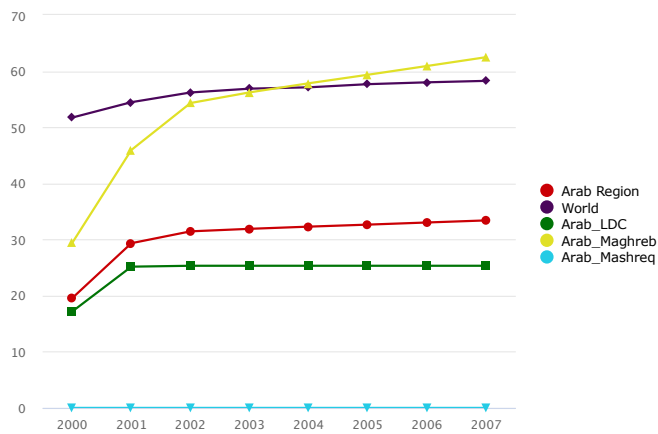
15.4.2 Mountain green cover, 2018 (Percentage)

Arab Region: 29.64
World: 73.19
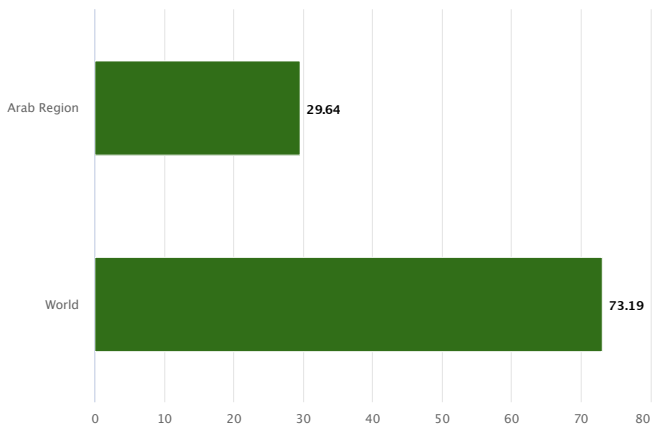
15.6.1 Countries parties or reporting to the international treaty on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture (Percentage)

Legend:
- Arab Region
- World

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

Evidence strength

25%
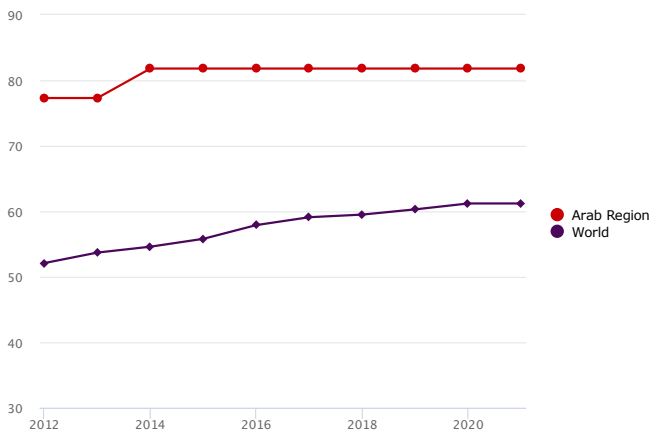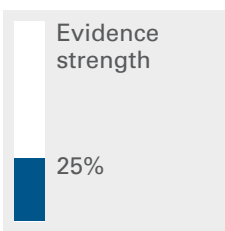
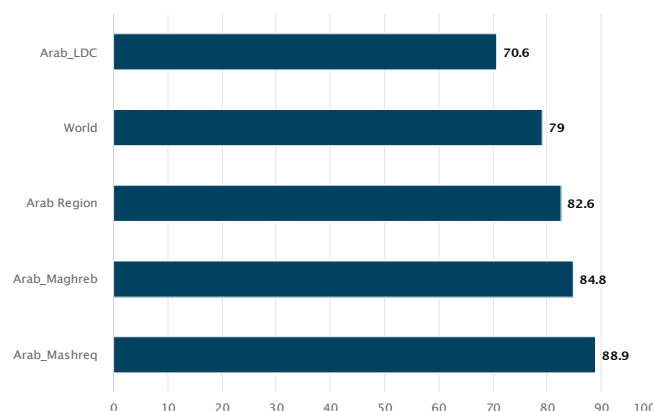# SDG 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions

- Intentional homicides are increasing in the region, but remain below the world's average.
- Children under age 14 in the region are more likely to experience physical punishment and/or psychological aggression compared with the world's average.
- Arab LDCs have a very low birth registration rate for under-5 children.
- Firms in the Arab region, notably those in the LDCs, are more likely to experience bribe payment requests.

Data on SDG 16 indicators remains largely unavailable at the regional level, with notable gaps in indicators related to personal safety, access to justice and governance, among others.
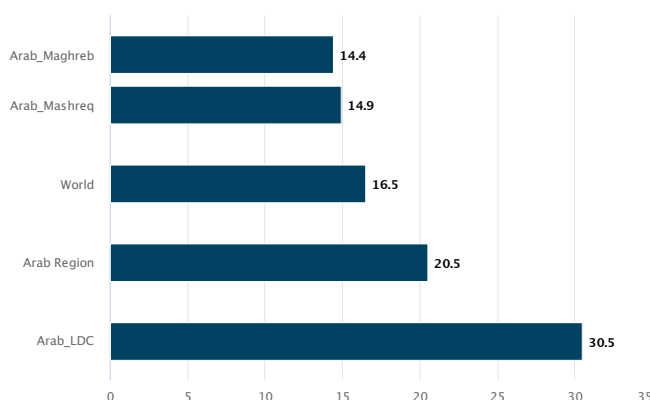
16.1.1 Intentional homicides (Per 100,000 population)

Arab Region	3.5 / 4.2
World	6.8 / 6

● 2000 ● 2015
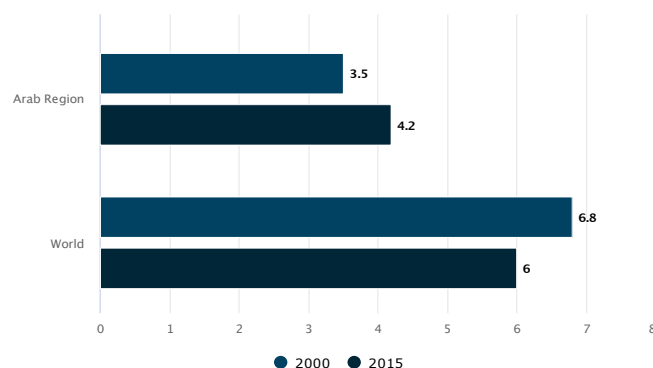
16.2.1 Children punishment, 2020 (Percentage)

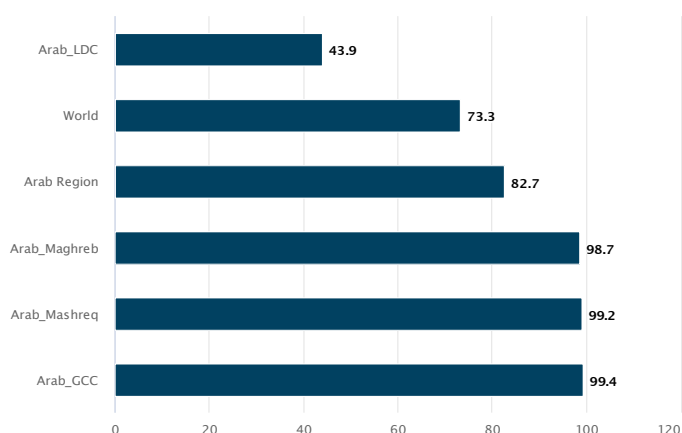|	
Arab_LDC	70.6
World	79
Arab Region	82.6
Arab_Maghreb	84.8
Arab_Mashreq	88.9

Note: Reflects the proportion of children aged 1-14 who experienced physical punishment and/or psychological aggression by caregivers in the last month.

16.5.2 Firms experiencing bribery, 2019 (Percentage)

Region	Value
Arab_Maghreb	14.4
Arab_Mashreq	14.9
World	16.5
Arab Region	20.5
Arab_LDC	30.5

16.9.1 Birth registration of under 5 children, 2020 (Percentage)

Region	Value
Arab_LDC	43.9
World	73.3
Arab Region	82.7
Arab_Maghreb	98.7
Arab_Mashreq	99.2
Arab_GCC	99.4

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

SDG 17 – Partnerships for the goals

Evidence strength

29%

- The Arab region has registered significant growth in Internet users and broadband subscriptions. However, for the latter, the region is yet to catch up with the world's average.

- The Arab region is not benefiting from global trade. For example, while displaying a growing trend, the region's share of global services exports remains modest. Fluctuations in the share of global merchandise exports may be attributed to the fact that oil and gas constitute a major share of the region's merchandise exports.

- The Arab region is above global averages in adopting statistical legislation that complies with global principles, and in developing fully-funded statistical plans. However, a smaller proportion of Arab countries have conducted
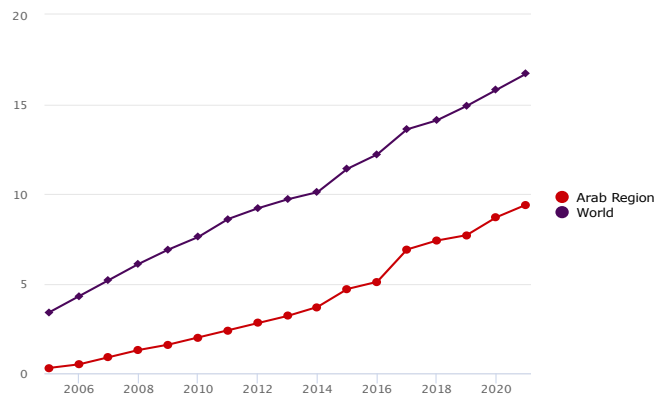
a population and housing census over the past 10 years, compared with the world's average.

The region exhibits major data shortages in several SDG 17 priority areas, including finance and resource mobilization, technology, trade, partnerships, and data collection.
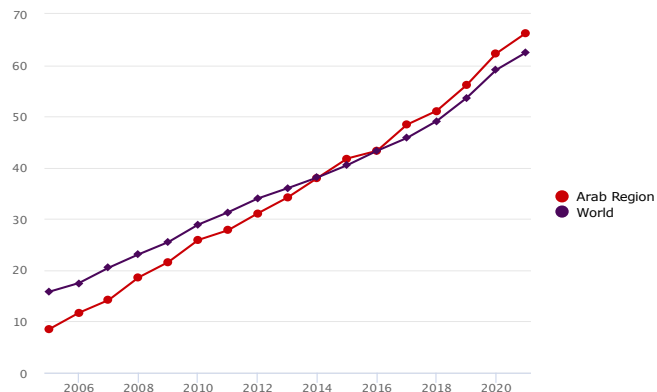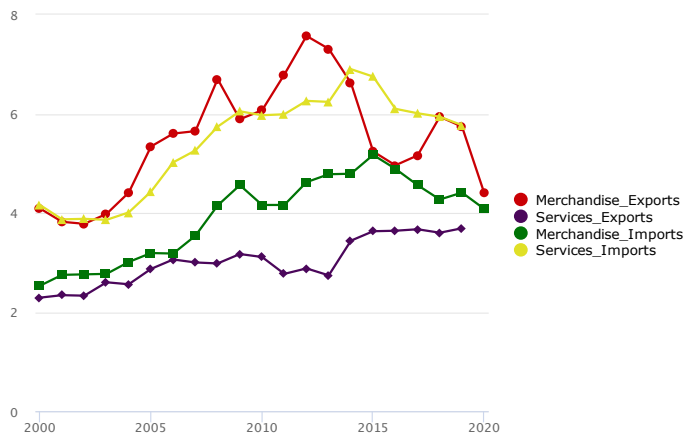
17.3.2 Remittances received (Percentage)
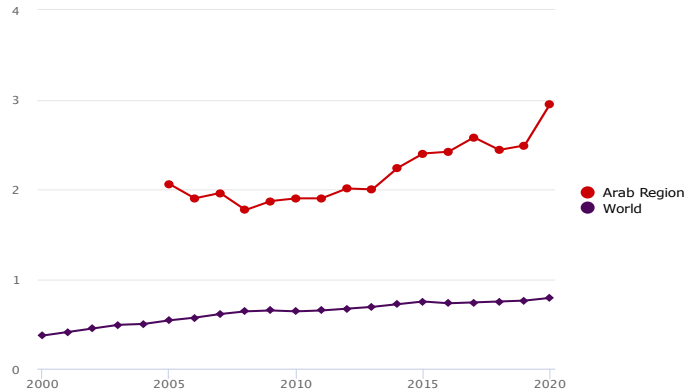
### 17.6.1 Broadband subscriptions (Percentage)

17.8.1 Internet users (Percentage)

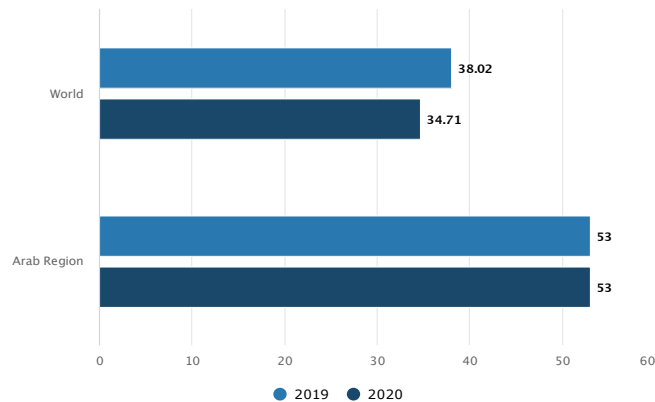## 17.11.1 Share of global merchandise and services trade for the Arab region (Percentage)

Legend:
- Merchandise_Exports
- Services_Exports
- Merchandise_Imports
- Services_Imports

17.18.2 Arab countries with national statistical legislation that complies with the fundamental Principles of official statistics (Percentage)
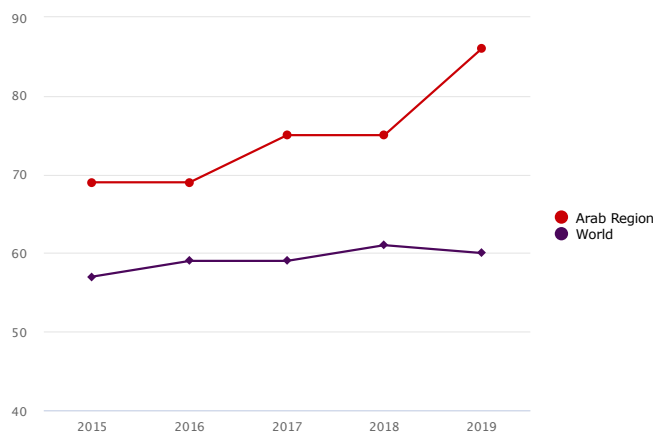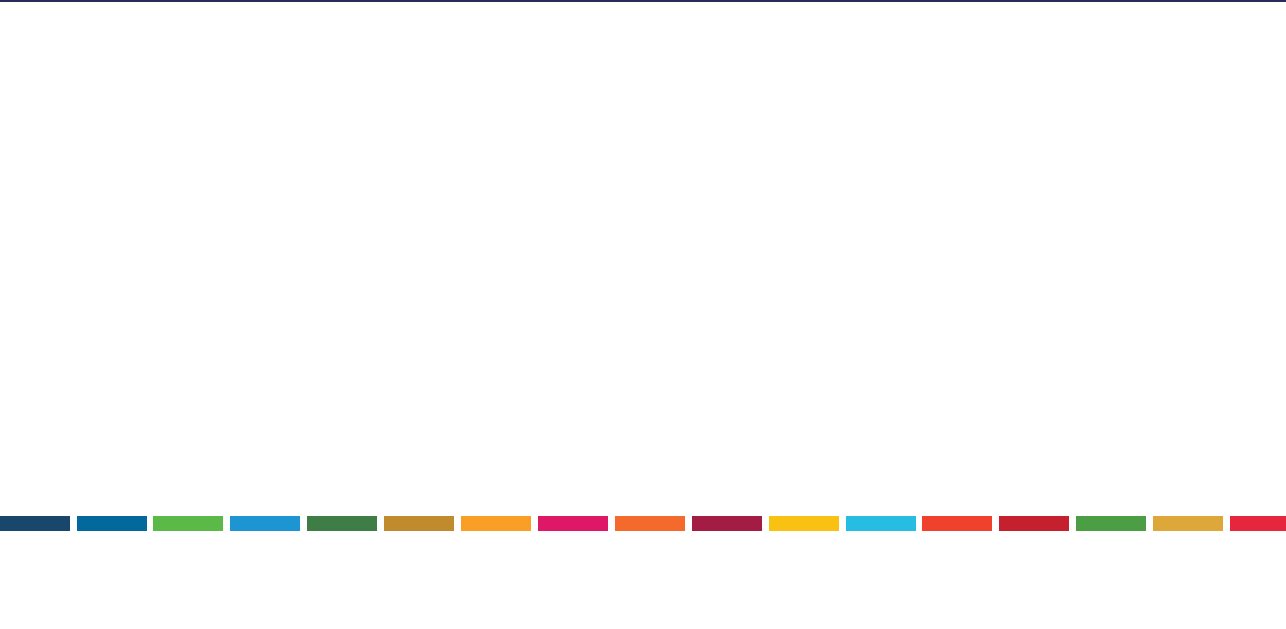

World: 56.2
Arab Region: 76
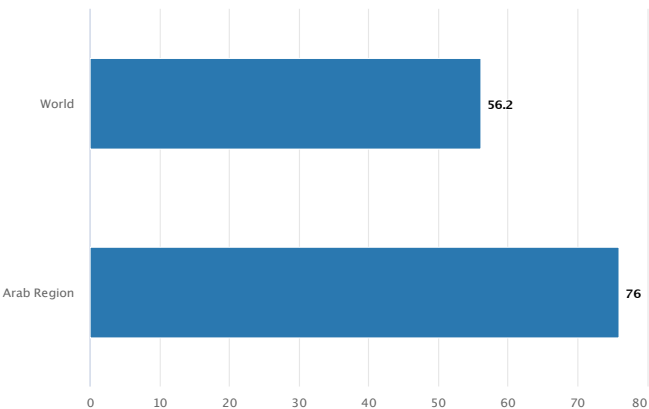
17.18.3 Fully funded statistical plans (Percentage)

World: 38.02 (2019), 34.71 (2020)
Arab Region: 53 (2019), 53 (2020)

Legend: 2019, 2020

17.19.2 Countries that have conducted at least one population and housing census in the last 10 years (Percentage)

- Arab Region
- World

Almost two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, Arab countries are recovering, albeit at different paces. Despite diminishing fiscal space and other constraints, they have deployed stimulus packages of varying sizes, and adopted policy response measures to safeguard livelihoods and revitalize economies. Innovative approaches have emerged in the Arab region that deserve to be institutionalized and scaled up going forward.

The Annual SDG Review 2022 focuses on the following three regional priorities for building back better from the COVID-19 crisis, while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Arab region: social protection, green economic recovery, and digital transformation. It also provides a statistical check-in on where the Arab region stands in terms of realizing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

22-00036