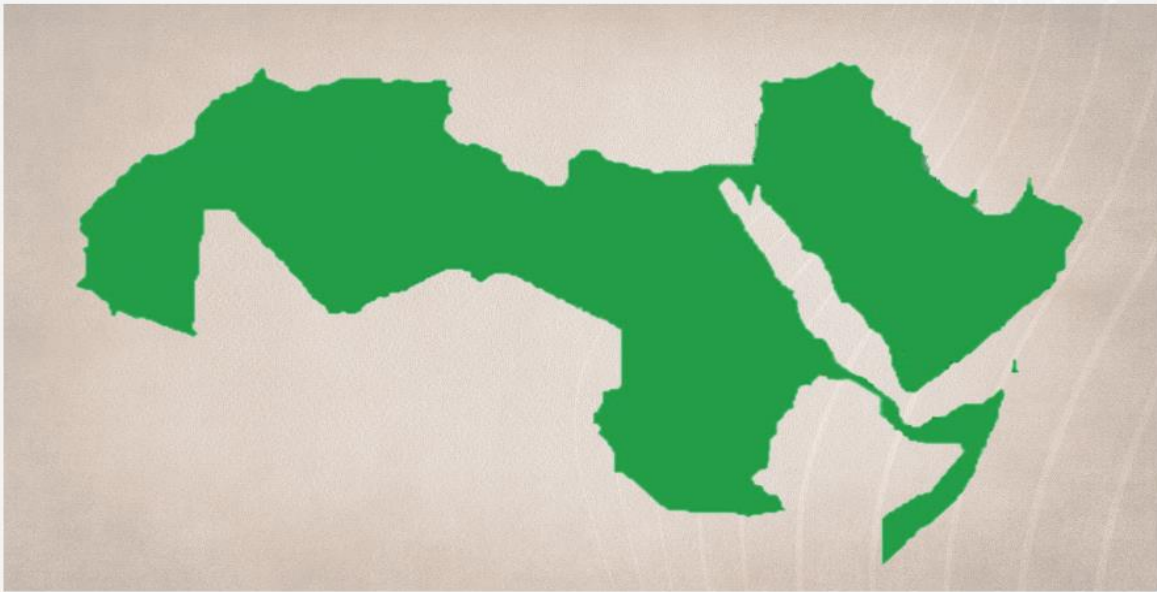


Periodic

Arab Countries Efforts to Leave No One Behind Evaluation of 2024 SDGs

6th issue: "2024 SDGs... Between Revealing Lenses and Enhanced Recommendations"



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Introduction

Assessments of the Arab region and analyses of its development indicators, particularly through previous issues of this periodical, have revealed persistent Arab efforts and strenuous work aimed at achieving sustainable development. This is especially true for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review for 2024, in a way that eliminates poverty and hunger, meets the needs and goals of climate action, peace, justice and strong institutions, and paves the way for partnerships for the goals in line with SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17. Notable progress has been recorded at both the regional and national levels in terms of these goals and their indicators, while also monitoring the challenges and obstacles facing their achievement. **In its sixth and final issue**, Maat presents a general review of the indicators of the SDGs under review for 2024, draws a comprehensive picture of the general challenges of those goals, and makes enhanced recommendations.



SDGs

Sustainable Development Goals

First: Overall Performance of Sustainable Development Goals under Review for 2024

The development efforts of the Arab countries reflected their interest in the goals, indicators and objectives of sustainable development, estimated at 196, 240 and 17 respectively. This interest was confirmed by the frameworks and visions of sustainable development for the Arab region, the most prominent and recent of which is the "**Arab World Vision 2045**". The development assessments revealed continuous progress, clearly evident in the path taken by 7 Arab countries to achieve sustainable development: **Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates**. However, it pointed to severe challenges that prevent 14 Arab countries from fully achieving one development goal, led by countries affected by conflicts,¹ and in this context, the final version re-extrapolates the development goals under review in 2024 as follows:

1. Goal 1: Eradicate Poverty in all its Forms Everywhere

The Arab region has not achieved its goal of eradicating poverty in a hoped-for manner, as the region currently includes about 250 million Arabs, between marginalized and poor. Weak, and about 1 in 3 Arabs live below the national poverty line, equivalent to 131 million, which are preliminary indicators that warn of the possibility of poverty rates reaching 36% in the Arab region by the end of 2024.² However, this differs and varies somewhat when talking about the indicators of the first goal at the national and country levels. Sometimes, it is noted that Arab countries, more than others, have made remarkable progress in eliminating, ending and reducing poverty, especially in the Gulf regions, including Qatar, Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. At other times, it is noted that poverty rates have risen and worsened sharply within the Arab regions in crisis that are living under the burden of conflicts, including Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Somalia and Syria. Monitoring the reality of Yemen reveals that between 71% and 78% of Yemenis suffer from poverty, while more than 90% of Syrians live below the poverty line, compared to 28% in 2010.

Thirdly, economic and structural challenges such as inflation, debt, and the decline in the effectiveness of social programs are observed, which prevent some Arab countries from achieving the first development goal of eradicating poverty, including Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon and Jordan.³

¹ Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Release of the Arab Region SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2023, 7 December 2023, <https://www.unsd.org/release-of-the-arab-region-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report-2023>

² UNDP, 'What are the Sustainable Development Goals?', access date December 17, 2023, <https://shorter.me/dWbMh>

³ البوابة العربية للتنمية، الاقتصاد الكلي، تاريخ الوصول يناير 2024، <https://shorter.me/K8oOv>

2. Goal 2: End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition in Arab Region

Statistics for 2024 reveal a concerning trend: the hunger rate has increased by over 75.9% since 2000. This translates to 59.8 million people suffering from malnutrition, representing 12.9% of the region's population. This figure surpasses the global average of 9.2%.⁴ Furthermore, 173.3 million people (37.9% of the population) experience food insecurity, lacking regular access to adequate and nutritious food.⁵ Hunger levels are particularly acute in Arab countries with low and least developed economies. Over two-thirds of malnourished individuals reside in conflict-affected Arab nations, and nearly half of the hungry population lives in the least developed countries. Somalia, Yemen, and the Syrian Arab Republic are among the countries most severely impacted by hunger.⁶

3. Goal 13: Climate Action in Arab Region

The Arab region faces unprecedented climate changes with severe and catastrophic consequences. The pace of warming is increasing at a rate of 4 degrees Celsius, exceeding the desired limit of 1.5 degrees Celsius set by the Paris Agreement.⁷ In mid-2024, Morocco leads Arab countries in climate performance, ranking 9th globally. Egypt follows at 22nd, categorized as a medium-performing country. Algeria has slipped six places to 54th, categorized as "very low" performing. UAE entered the index this year at 65th, also categorized as "lowest performing" with a "very low" level in greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, and energy use. Saudi Arabia ranks last in the Arab world at 67th, categorized as "lowest ranked" with a **"very low"** level in all four index categories.⁸

4. Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions in Arab Region

Goal 16 of the SDGs focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable peace and security, while the Arab region is making efforts to achieve security and peace, it remains the least secure region in the world for the eighth consecutive year. The region experienced over 18% of the world's conflicts between 1948 and 2014, with approximately 172 million citizens living in conflict-affected areas.⁹ Qatar, Kuwait, Oman,

⁴ World Vision, Middle East crisis: Food insecurity, hunger, access date July 2024, <https://bit.ly/co/R0ax>

⁵ Relief web, Food Policy Monitoring in the Near East and North Africa region (2nd Quarter 2023 | Bulletin), 5 August 2023, <https://shorter.me/PQnhA>

⁶ RW, 2023 Near East and North Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition - Statistics and Trends, 23 November 2023, <https://bit.ly/co/R0bU>

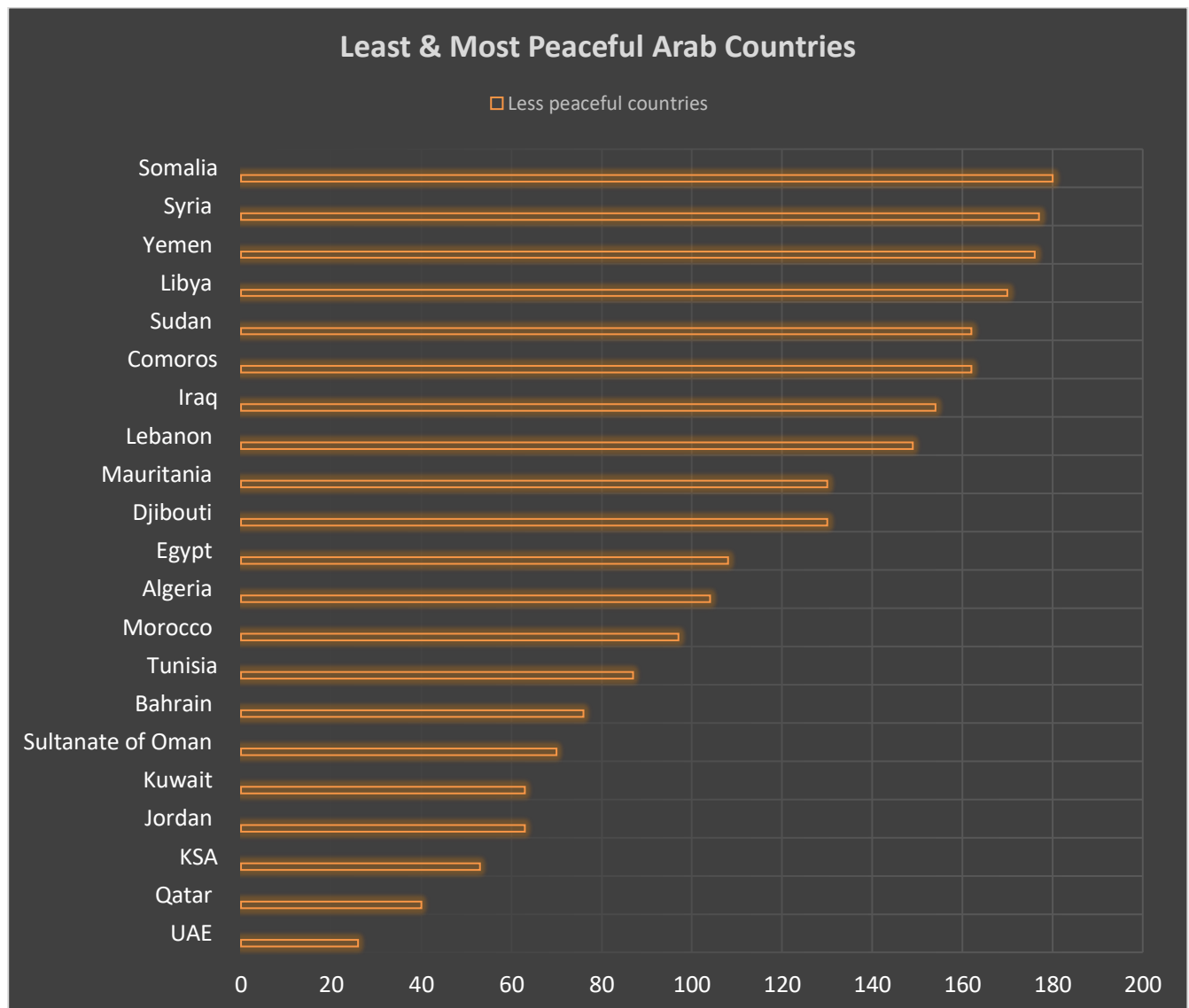
⁷ Brookings, Climate change may devastate the Middle East. Here's how governments should tackle it, 14 March 2022, <https://brook.gs/3UzLb7u>

⁸ Egyptian streets, NEWSEgypt's Sisi Calls for International Community to Support Africa's Climate Action at COP26 Conference, 3 November 2021, <https://bit.ly/3xc2noB>

⁹ الإسكو، التقدم نحو أهداف التنمية المستدامة في المنطقة العربية، تاريخ الوصول 16 ديسمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/6iv8h>

Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates top the list of Arab countries in the Peace Index for 2023. Conversely, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, and Iraq occupy the bottom of the list.¹⁰ Crime rates are significantly higher in Yemen, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Somalia, with 45, 40, 35, 30, and 25 crimes per 1000 people respectively. In contrast, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Jordan, and Lebanon have significantly lower crime rates, with 1.5, 2, 3, and 3.5 crimes per 1000 people respectively.¹¹

Arab region also records low scores on the Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023. Most Arab countries score below 50, with the worst levels of corruption found in conflict-affected countries like Libya, Sudan, Yemen, Syria, and Somalia.¹²



¹⁰ بوابة الوسط، ليبيا تسجل أكبر نسبة تحسن في «مؤشر السلام العالمي» لعام 2023، أغسطس 2023، <https://alwasat.ly/news/libya/407389>

¹¹ الحادثة، معدلات الجريمة في 2023 وسيناريوهات العام المقبل.. انخفضت 4.5٪، ديسمبر 2023، <https://www.alhadtha.com/37565>

¹² الجزيرة، بلغة الأرقام.. خبراء يكشفون أسباب تفشي الفساد في الدول العربية وكيف يمكن محاربه في المنطقة، مايو 2024، <https://shorter.me/gxeup>

5. Goal 17: Partnerships for Goals

Arab countries have actively pursued partnerships at national, regional, bilateral, and multilateral levels. Significant progress has been made towards achieving Goal 17 objectives, particularly in areas like development assistance, technology, intra-trade, and debt sustainability. Some countries in the region have made remarkable progress and development contributions. Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the top three donor countries globally, providing over \$130 billion in aid over the past decades, benefiting 196 countries.¹³ UAE has consistently ranked among top 20 donor countries for over a decade, based on its gross national income.¹⁴

Intra-trade within the Arab region has grown to approximately \$700 billion, representing 10-11% of global trade volume.¹⁵ In Technology, internet usage has surged, reaching 275 million users, representing approximately 64% of the Arab population. Internet penetration rates are particularly high in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (100%), followed by the Maghreb countries, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria, (69%) and the Levant countries, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine in addition to Egypt (65%).

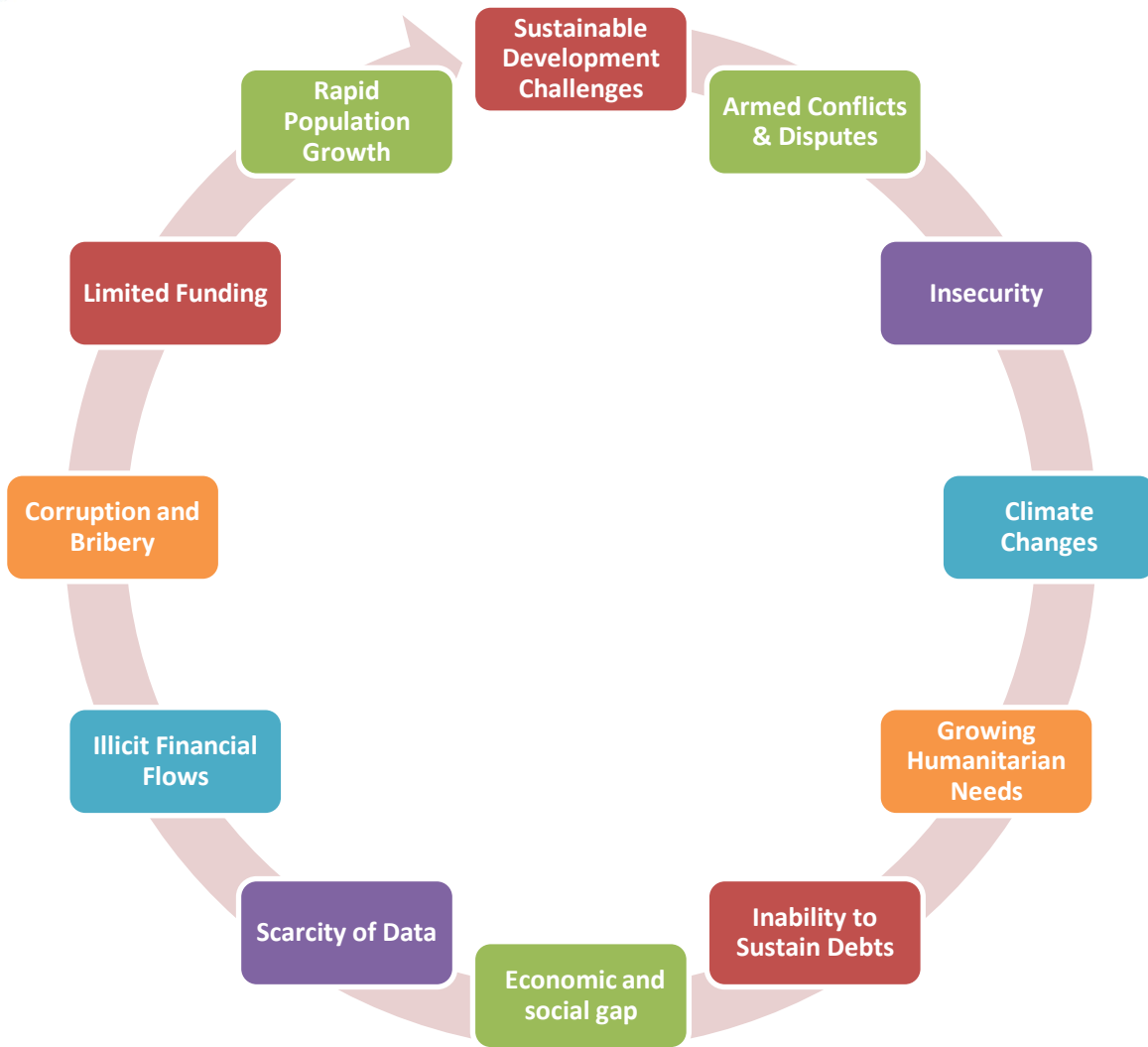
Challenges to Sustainable Development in Arab Region

Despite these achievements, the Arab region faces significant challenges hindering its progress towards sustainable development. These challenges include:

¹³ الشرق الأوسط، عقود من المساعدات السعودية تلامس 130 مليار دولار، 26 يونيو 2024، <https://bitly.co/Onkl>

¹⁴ الاتحاد، الإمارات.. جهود رائدة لإغاثة ضحايا الكوارث الطبيعية، 2 ديسمبر 2023، <https://bitly.co/Onkj>

¹⁵ سكاى نيوز عربية، تضاعف قيمة مشاريع الاستثمار الأجنبي بالدول العربية في 2022، 27 يوليو 2023، <https://bitly.co/Onqw>



1. Armed Conflicts & Disputes:

Escalating conflicts and disputes pose a major obstacle to development efforts in the Arab region. Globally, violent conflicts accounted for 50% of global deaths in 2022, with an economic cost of \$17.5 trillion.¹⁶ Within the Arab region, 80% of countries experience ongoing conflicts, disputes, and political and social instability. Wars and conflicts have cost Arab countries over \$900 billion between 2011 and 2018, particularly in countries like Libya, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine. These conflicts have affected 180 million Arabs living in neighboring countries.¹⁷ In Palestine, the war has set back development by 16-11 years, and by 19-16 years in the Gaza Strip.¹⁸ In Syria, the conflict has created

¹⁶ بوابة الوسط، ليبيا تسجل أكبر نسبة تحسن في «مؤشر السلام العالمي» لعام 2023، أغسطس 2023، <https://alwasat.ly/news/libya/407389>

¹⁷ البوابة العربية للتنمية، ديمغرافيا، تاريخ 16 ديسمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/z-0cu>

¹⁸ البرنامج الإنمائي للأمم المتحدة، ارتفاع معدل الفقر في دولة فلسطين بأكثر من الثلث في حال استمرار الحرب لشهر ثانٍ، 9 نوفمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/uRaCE>

humanitarian needs for 15.3 million people. In Yemen, the war has eroded sustainable development efforts for over 30 years.¹⁹

2. Insecurity (Terrorism, Organized Crime, and Human Trafficking):

Terrorism, organized crime, and human trafficking pose significant threats to sustainable development goals, particularly Goal 1 (Eradicate Poverty) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). When looking at its security indicators, especially terrorism indicators, it becomes clear that only five Arab countries are free from terrorist activity, while nine countries have seen improvements and seven have experienced severe deterioration. In 2023, the region witnessed 580 terrorist attacks, resulting in 2,035 deaths. During the first quarter of 2024, 66 terrorist operations were recorded in seven Arab countries.²⁰

The rise of criminal networks poses a major threat to sustainable development in the Arab region. These networks undermine the rule of law, weaken security, destabilize economies, and impede progress towards achieving the SDGs. They also deprive governments of revenue, thus fueling corruption. Human trafficking is another serious issue in the Arab region. Statistics indicate that 10 out of every 1,000 people are victims of some form of human trafficking, sex trafficking, or forced marriage.²¹

3. Climate Change (High Temperatures, Water Scarcity and Fragility)

Climate change is a critical challenge for the Arab region, impacting all SDGs efforts, including those related to SDGs under discussion (1,2,13,16,17). The Arab region is experiencing a rise in temperatures at twice the global average, leading to extreme heat and potential uninhabitability by 2075. Rising sea levels threaten to displace 12% of the Gulf population,²² causing significant displacement and economic disruption. Climate change is exacerbating water scarcity, leading to economic losses equivalent to 14% of the Arab region's GDP and a 30% decrease in agricultural productivity by 2050.²³

The region is increasingly vulnerable to dust storms, hurricanes, and floods, causing significant damage to infrastructure and livelihoods. The recent floods in Libya in October 2023, caused by Hurricane "Daniel," resulted in estimated losses of \$4.3

¹⁹ البوابة العربية للتنمية، ديمغرافيا، تاريخ 16 ديسمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/z-0cu>

²⁰ مؤسسة ماعت للسلام والتنمية وحقوق الإنسان، 30 مايو 2024، <https://bityl.co/QzVE>

²¹ THE Exodus Road, Human Trafficking in the Middle East, March 2024, <https://theexodusroad.com/human-trafficking-middle-east/>

²² البنك الدولي، دفع عجلة التحوّل إلى الأمام: خريطة طريق للعمل المناخي لمنطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا، يناير 2022، <https://shorter.me/xLzhO>

²³ UNDP, Rising to the challenge: Climate action in the Arab region, 28 September 2023, <https://shorter.me/2Atzs>

billion.²⁴ Yemen is particularly vulnerable to climate change, with projected GDP losses of \$93 billion, an additional 3.8 million people facing malnutrition, and over 121,000 deaths by 2060.²⁵

4. Rapid Population Growth:

There is no doubt that sustainable development efforts are eroding and constantly retreating in the face of the enormous population increases in the Arab region, which exceeded about 436.4 million, equivalent to three times the number in 1971, and approximately 5.6% of the world's population.²⁶ Despite the positive population indicators regarding expectancy and mortality, this It is not met with satisfactory development efforts that keep pace with the rises or at least invest in their efforts and capabilities. The region needs to create approximately 60-100 million jobs by 2030 to address unemployment and prevent further poverty, hunger, and crime, which would threaten the achievement of SDGs 1, 2, and 16.²⁷

5. Limited Funding:

Insufficient funding remains a significant obstacle to achieving the SDGs in the Arab region. There is no development without financing. While Goal 17 emphasizes the importance of funding for development, the region requires an estimated \$230 billion annually until 2030. Twelve Arab countries face a funding gap of \$660 billion annually by 2030,²⁸ hindering progress on goals related to poverty, hunger, and climate action. For climate action alone (SDG13), the region needs \$400 billion to bridge the funding gap by 2030.²⁹

6. Growing Humanitarian Needs:

It appears that the mobilization of development, humanitarian and relief aid in Arab region has not achieved the desired improvement. Arab region continues to face multiple and complex crises, including conflicts, displacement, damage to vital infrastructure, and natural disasters. Approximately 70 million people in the Arab region require humanitarian assistance, including 27 million children. 50 million people in need of assistance live in countries affected by conflict, including approximately 24 million

²⁴ بوابة الوسط، تقديرات دولية: 4.3 مليار دولار خسائر العاصفة «دانيال» في ليبيا، أكتوبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/eDazo>

²⁵ البرنامج الإنمائي للأمم المتحدة في المنطقة العربية، تقرير برنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي: توقعات تبين الآثار المدمرة لتغير المناخ على التنمية البشرية في اليمن، 3 ديسمبر 2023،

<https://shorter.me/Y2LsH>

²⁶ البوابة العربية للتنمية، ديمغرافيا، تاريخ الوصول ديسمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/i98uf>

²⁷ الإسكو، عدم المساواة في المنطقة العربية: قبلة موقوتة، مايو 2022، <https://shorter.me/Qpait>

²⁸ سي إن إن الاقتصادية، القطاع الخاص والاستدامة في الدول العربية.. فجوة بين الإجراءات والأهداف، نوفمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/5hCi>

²⁹ اليوم السابع، التخطيط: 400 مليار دولار لسد فجوة تمويل المناخ بالمنطقة العربية، 15 سبتمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/iFH2z>

children.³⁰ The region is home to approximately 9 million refugees and 19 million internally displaced persons living in challenging conditions.³¹

7. Inability to Sustain Debts:

The Arab region is grappling with a debt crisis, making it difficult to manage debt burdens and maintain economic, social, and political stability. Total Arab debts are close to \$1.5 trillion, representing a significant portion of the GDP of many countries. For example, debt levels are equivalent to 94% of Egypt's GDP, 24% of Saudi Arabia's GDP, 32% of the UAE's GDP, 57% of Algeria's GDP, 35% of Iraq's GDP, 46% of Syria's GDP, 77% of Morocco's GDP, 284% of Sudan's GDP, 117% of Bahrain's GDP, and 44% of Oman's GDP.³²

8. Corruption, Bribery, and Tax Evasion

High levels of institutional fragility and corruption, bribery, and tax evasion pose significant challenges to achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and its inability to address the problems of corruption, bribery and tax evasion. Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023 reveals a high prevalence of corruption in Arab countries, particularly Somalia, Syria, and Yemen, which ranked 180, 177, and 176 globally, respectively. These countries are all affected by long-term crises, many of which involve armed conflict. For bribery, indicators show that 20% of companies in the Arab region have been asked to pay a bribe at least once. Thus, Arab governments lose approximately \$9 billion annually due to tax violations committed by multinational companies, often through practices like profit shifting to avoid tax responsibilities.³³

9. Illicit Financial Flows:

Illicit financial flows undermine efforts to achieve the SDGs, particularly those related to enhancing financing capabilities. These flows deplete financial resources, distort macroeconomic stability, and drain local public revenues that could be used to finance national and regional development efforts. Illicit financial flows cost the Arab region an estimated \$60.3-\$77.5 billion annually and have cost the region approximately \$482.7 billion between 2008 and 2015, equivalent to one-fifth of the Arab region's GDP.³⁴

³⁰ UNICEF, Humanitarian Response All Country Offices in MENA are empowered to deliver timely, equitable and principled humanitarian action, Access date June 2024, <https://shorter.me/v-H7b>

³¹ الأمم المتحدة، اتجاهات مقلقة وتمسك بالأمل: لجنة أممية تتبع مسار التنمية المستدامة في الدول العربية، مارس 2024، <https://bitly.co/QnlG>

³² الإسكو، التدفقات المالية غير المشروعة في المنطقة العربية، تاريخ الوصول يونيو 2024، <https://bitly.co/QnqW>

³³ المنتدى العربي للتنمية المستدامة، الهدف 17 من أهداف التنمية المستدامة عقد الشراكات من أجل تحقيق الأهداف، تاريخ الوصول يونيو 2024، ص 1-10.

³⁴ البوابة العربية للتنمية، النوع الاجتماعي، تاريخ الوصول 17 ديسمبر 2023، <https://shorter.me/zvQSC>

10. Scarcity of Data and Information:

The Arab region suffers from a lack of sufficient data, assessments, and information on sustainable development. According to the official framework of global indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals, sufficient data exists for only 42% of the SDG indicators, while 11% have insufficient data, and 47% have no data. This lack of data presents a significant challenge to region's ability to formulate, re-evaluate or reform development plans, visions and strategies in a way that affects their performance in all objectives achieving the SDGs, particularly Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), which requires an adequate and technologically up-to-date information environment.³⁵

11. Widening Economic and Social Gaps:

The Arab region faces significant economic and social inequality, hindering the enjoyment of the SDGs by all. The Arab region ranks among the least equal countries globally, with a vast gap between the rich and the poor. Ten percent of the Arab population owns over 80% of the region's wealth, while 90% of the population owns only 20%. The Arab region is projected to take over 179 years to achieve gender equality, compared to 142 years globally, highlighting the need for significant progress in empowering women and girls.



Recommendations

At the conclusion of this Sustainable Development Journal in the Arab Region, titled "**Arab Countries Efforts to Leave No One Behind: Evaluation of 2024 SDGs**," in 6 successive issues, and after highlighting the sustainable development goals under review, providing an analytical evaluation of indicators of general goals, Periodical ends by presenting a set of recommendations related to the five goals under review during this year's High-Level Political Forum.

First: Recommendations Related to First Goal: Poverty:

- Governments should **launch comprehensive social protection systems for vulnerable families**, enhance financial investments in these systems, and encourage private sector and civil society participation to carry out their roles.
- Governments should focus on **building resilience and addressing disasters, crises, and fluctuations that contribute to poverty**, such as COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, droughts, and climate change. This includes developing early warning systems for emergencies.
- Governments should **accelerate efforts to improve and expand access to health, basic, and educational services**, especially for women, children, and youth.
- Countries with high population growth and fertility rates should **develop targeted strategies to regulate population growth** in a manner consistent with production capacities and development efforts.

Second: Recommendations Related to Second Goal: Eliminating Hunger:

- Governments should **increase cooperation and trade exchange in food and agricultural inputs**, encouraging trade arrangements and adopting joint agricultural measures and practices.
- Governments should establish a **regional mechanism to coordinate the exchange of agricultural products and food aid**, ensuring humanitarian needs are met, addressing food security challenges, and enhancing food safety.
- Governments should **reconsider policies related to eliminating hunger** and develop new policies that promote sustainable agricultural development and ensure food production diversity.

Third: Recommendations Related to the Thirteenth Goal: Climate Action:

- Governments should prioritize **raising the level of preparedness for climate change**, updating environmental protection laws and regulations, and developing monitoring, assessment, early warning, and disaster prediction systems.
- Governments should protect environment in all its dimensions, rehabilitate it, and reduce environmental degradation by **restoring healthy ecosystems**, such as stopping deforestation, soil erosion, and urban sprawl, creating wetlands capable of absorbing greenhouse emissions, and protecting and restore coastal ecosystems.
- Governments of Arab Region should **create a conducive environment for civil society** and youth, to enable civil society organizations and youth stakeholders to contribute to combating climate change. This includes directing their capabilities towards formulating and monitoring nationally determined contributions, creating spaces for training, education, and awareness, and providing an information database on climate action for local citizens.

Fourth: Recommendations related to Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

- Arab governments, particularly those struggling to achieve Goal 16 (including Libya, Yemen, and Sudan), should **cooperate with all stakeholders and civil society institutions** to respond to calls for a ceasefire and commit to a peaceful transfer of power.
- Arab governments, especially Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, should take the following steps to combat corruption and reduce its indicators through conduct practical and immediate investigations into corruption crimes, create effective, transparent, and accountable national institutions at all levels.
- Arab governments should enhance **capacity building and training programs for security and combat institutions**, providing them with weapons and expertise to establish security and peace and confront challenges such as human trafficking and terrorism.

Fifth: Recommendations related to Goal 17: Partnerships

- Arab governments affected by conflict (Syria, Sudan, and Yemen) should **enhance their financing capabilities allows for development spending** that ensures full, rapid, and reasonable access to health, social, and economic services, and supports humanitarian response.

- Stakeholders and creditors should cooperate with Arab countries, especially those affected by debt distress or on the verge of falling into it, to launch programs that alleviate, freeze, or restructure debt and free development resources from the debt crisis.
- Arab governments should **launch reform programs for financial and tax systems** in the region to combat corruption, money laundering, and illicit financial flows.
- Arab governments should accelerate efforts to establish a **regional mechanism to localize and facilitate sustainable technology** and digital transformation among Arab countries.
- Arab governments should localize monitoring and follow-up programs for the SDGs. This includes periodic monitoring, **preparing and measuring indicators, and enhancing the information and statistical infrastructure for the SDGs**. This will allow for evaluating existing partnerships and developing new ones.