
THE WATER SITUATION IN THE ESCWA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The ESCWA region comprises of thirteen countries in western Asia. Most of the ESCWA countries are classified as arid and semi-arid countries.

The ESCWA region can be classified into three groups depending on climate, hydrological and geological regimes:

The first group consists of countries situated in arid, extremely arid countries, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

The second group countries are those situated in arid areas of the ESCWA region, which include Palestine and some parts of Jordan and Yemen.

The third group countries are situated in relatively semi-arid zones and include Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic.

The per capita share is just above the international poverty threshold of 1000m³/capita/yr.

Eight countries have less than 500m³/capita/yr. (Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Palestine Authority, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen). Six countries out of the eight (Bahrain, Jordan, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar Yemen) have less than 200m³/capita/yr. and are among the worlds fifteen poorest countries for the provision of water.

The agricultural sector is the largest water user in the region estimated to be 83% of the total water use, whereas domestic water requirement 8 % and industrial requirements at 9% represent only a small fraction of the total water utilized.

Hence, water is a vital issue in the region, the water resources comprises of conventional (namely surface water and ground water), and non-conventional (namely reuse of agricultural drainage water, treated waste water and desalinated water). Most of the GCC countries rely on their water supply from the desalination of seawater and of brackish water.

Ground water is also a vital source of water, and for this reason, protection, management and conservation of ground water became essential in the region.

Water quality is of a major concern in protecting the ground water aquifer from contamination and depletion. Extensive studies on ground water protection and remediation have been performed by ESCWA along with assisting the countries in the region with their technical and practical problems through expert group meetings, workshops and advice.

The shared ground water consists of two major aquifers, namely the Basalt aquifer shared by Syria and Jordan; and the Paleogene aquifer mainly shared by Saudi Arabia, UAE, the Sultanate of Oman, and Yemen.

Since the water share per capita is depleting until the year 2050, it became imperative to stress on the value of water, its conservation and protection through:

- Capacity building
- Public awareness
- Enhancing of role of gender
- Law enforcement
- Water pricing

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- Fixing all deteriorating and leaky pipe networks
 - Monitoring observation wells
 - Conservation and protection of surface and ground water
 - Strategy for water management and networking

Water resources issues are more significant in this region than any other part of the world. At present a clear imbalance between available water resources and water demands exists in most of the countries of the region, with the remaining countries approaching critical conditions.