

ARAB STATES

Key Statistics

Overview

The Arab states consist of 23 countries and territories and have an estimated population of 320 million people.

Poverty

The economics of the region are very diverse, with a mixture of wealthy Gulf, middle-income and poor countries. The region is home to six least-developed countries (including Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen), which represent 22 percent of the population of the region. Rural and conflict areas are particularly affected by poverty—approximately 90 percent of Sudanese, 73 percent of Somalis and 58 percent of Palestinians live below the poverty line.

Natural Disasters

The Arab States are subject to many natural disasters including earthquakes, drought and floods. In addition, rapid growth of urban areas in countries such as Jordan and Algeria has increased the vulnerability of populations. In Algeria, 90 percent of the infrastructure and population are located in areas at high risk of earthquakes. The region also suffers from scarcity of natural resources. In Somalia and Sudan, the increasingly volatile environmental conditions have aggravated tensions around the access to water, arable land and oil.

Unexploded Remnants of War

The region is affected by landmines, cluster munitions and other unexploded ordnance of war from both current conflicts and those as far back as World War II. According to the Landmine Monitor, at least 14 countries and territories in the Arab states are contaminated with unexploded ordnance of war (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the occupied Palestinian territories, Tunisia, Yemen and Syria), which litter fields, farm land, homes and gardens, posing a long-term threat to the lives and livelihoods of civilians.

Gender Equality

Although some Arab countries have made progress toward gender equality (especially Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), national legislation in many Arab states does not provide women equal rights. Some states severely restrict women's right to work or penalize women who work without their husbands' consent. In many cases only husbands can dictate divorce, and courts often punish female defendants more harshly and show lenience in cases in which men are accused of crimes against women. Women's access to education has tripled in the last 35 years, but more than half of adult women in the region are still illiterate. The region has the lowest rate of women's participation in parliament, with only 9.1 percent of seats held by women. In addition, violence against women is prominent in some parts of the region.



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Conflict

Over the past few years, the region has witnessed a steep rise in violent conflicts leading to numerous humanitarian crises of dramatic scale and intensity. Crises are widespread in the region, ranging from decades of unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict to the protracted wars in Somalia and Sudan, and the most recent conflicts in Iraq, Gaza, and Lebanon. These crises have devastating effects, ranging from massive displacement, deprivation, poverty and systematic human rights violations directed at entire populations.

Call to Action:

Women must be given equal opportunities to justice, political participation, healthcare, education, and livelihoods, including access to land and credit.

In a region scarred by violent conflicts, early prevention and conflict management must be prioritized. Reintegrating former combatants into society and providing them with livelihoods is essential for peace and development.

Continued international support is needed to eliminate the horrendous impact of mines and other unexploded ordnance of war on civilians.

The sustainable management of natural resources is essential to improve livelihoods opportunities for affected populations and to cement future peace in the region.

Disaster risk management and urban planning are crucial to reducing death, injury and economic loss as the result of natural disasters.



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UNDP in Action:

In the Arab states UNDP:

- **Addresses sexual and gender-based violence** by providing legal aid to victims of sexual violence and promoting the participation of women in the police force in Sudan, and by establishing the first Women Lawyers' Association to aid victims of rape and domestic violence in Somalia.
- **Clears unexploded remnants of war** in Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia and Sudan. Support to national authorities in Yemen has enabled them to take over mine action initiatives and the country is well on its way to being cleared.
- **Improves access to justice and increases the participation of women in legal and decision-making processes** in South Sudan by establishing a Women's Legislator's Forum, a Consultant Forum of Women Office Bearers of Political Parties and women civil society networks to increase the number of women working in state institutions. It also supports leadership training for young women in Somalia.
- **Supports disaster risk reduction programmes** in Egypt, Jordan and Syria.
- Strengthens the skills of local authorities and helps **restore access to basic social and economic services** in Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territories and Somalia.
- **Supports disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants** in Sudan.
- **Encourages rule of law reform, reconciliation and peacebuilding** in the occupied Palestinian territories, Somalia and Sudan.

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