



## المنتدى العربي للتنمية المستدامة

إسراع العمل نحو خطة عام 2030 ما بعد كوفيد

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**12** RESPONSIBLE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND PRODUCTION



# SDG 12

## RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Ensure sustainable consumption  
and production patterns

SDG 12 encapsulates the entire sustainable development paradigm at the local, national, regional and global levels. In the Arab region, the urgent need to address unsustainable consumption and production patterns is clearly reflected in various trends, such as increasing water scarcity, rising energy use and associated greenhouse gas emissions, escalating waste generation, low levels of reuse and recycling, and worsening air and water pollution (SDGs 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15). Several countries have recently adopted national sustainable consumption and production plans, a step in the right direction. However, major adjustments to incentives driving unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are needed. Progress requires shifting from a focus on economic growth alone to embracing sustainable development, mobilizing and regulating the

private sector to support such a transformation, and engaging communities and individuals in steering this paradigm shift.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected consumption patterns in the Arab region. Additional pressure on hospitals and health-care facilities (SDG 3), teleworking from home and commuting disruptions (SDGs 8 and 1), as well as additional hygiene and safety measures, have required Governments and local authorities to rapidly adapt and reshape their services with regards to medical and municipal waste (SDG 11). Several industries have slowed, thus finding schemes to increase their resilience is a priority for the region (SDG 9). This is an opportunity to ensure that recovery plans reorient policies and practices towards greener more sustainable consumption and production models.

## Impact of COVID-19 on SDG 12 in the Arab region



Measuring progress on SDG 12 remains a challenge in the Arab region and globally, which also poses difficulties in assessing the impact of COVID-19 on SDG 12 targets in the region. This is also true for assessing the increase in medical waste during the pandemic, hazardous waste and water use, among other things.

### Green transition efforts and momentum in the region may be affected, but a critical opportunity exists to move forward on SDG 12:

- Given the current difficult economic situation, Arab Governments are focusing on immediate relief financial packages. Resources are stretched, and the emphasis is on protecting different industries, which could affect green transition efforts in the region. Green fiscal policies can play a key role in shaping the recovery. While Arab Governments are devising fiscal stimulus policies to maximize short-term growth and employment generation, there is a great opportunity to steer economies towards a green and fair transition;
- The oil price collapse has created a window of opportunity for carbon taxes and fossil fuel subsidy reform to mobilize revenue and drive low-carbon development, especially in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Green budgeting can rationalize

inefficient expenditures and align spending with sustainability;

- Job losses in the region are particularly devastating given the levels of high unemployment that predated the pandemic. As Arab economies continue to rely mostly on rent and services, the region has yet to take advantage of the potential of green industries. In addition, investments in sustainable infrastructure in Arab countries will be key for building more resilient societies after the pandemic, while also creating millions of jobs.

### Will the crisis signal a change in consumption patterns when it comes to food loss and waste?

There is lack of quantitative information about food loss and food waste in the region, and it is difficult to analyse the pandemic's impact along the food value chain. There is no existing data on the amount of food waste generated in Arab countries. A baseline is essential to monitor changes in food loss and food waste generation over time. Only Saudi Arabia has made efforts to establish a baseline for food waste generation.

Food waste and loss appeared to increase owing to lockdowns and restrictions on movement and

## Some countries across the Maghreb have expressed commitments to a green recovery, putting in place promising policy instruments.

*For instance, Morocco has introduced measures to support a transition to renewable energy and to greening the building sector (link). The Moroccan Economic, Social and Environmental Council's main study on the impact of COVID-19 stressed the importance of the crisis as an opportunity for structural change, especially with regard to consumption and production patterns in the country. It urged a focus on this shift as the country emerges from the crisis and revamps its development planning model in 2021.*

*Some Arab countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, have witnessed notable drops in air pollutants as a result of transportation restrictions. Between 1 February and 30 April 2020, the United Arab Emirates recorded an average 30 per cent decline in the levels of nitrogen dioxide.*

*Ministry of Climate Change and Environment of the United Arab Emirates.*

transportation. In a United Nations survey conducted on the status of food waste in a number of Arab countries, 33 per cent of respondents reported that food waste generation had increased since the start of the pandemic. However, a web-based survey on attitudes and behaviours towards food waste before and after the pandemic outbreak shows promising trends towards food reuse, which could be strengthened going forward.

## Measures taken by Arab Governments

- 1. The COVID-19 crisis response in Arab countries has not explicitly focused on sustainable consumption and production.** Many countries, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have offered fiscal stimulus packages to support individuals and the private sector through various forms of financial relief. Greening elements were not addressed in any of the packages.
- 2. However, some policy initiatives are promising steps towards green recovery plans, including the following:**
  - At the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week 2021, GCC leaders reconfirmed decarbonization pledges, highlighting the necessity of a green recovery for a sustainable social and economic future in the post-pandemic world. GCC countries are moving forward on commitments to realize national decarbonization goals, with a focus on solar energy as the anchor to national renewable strategies. The United Arab Emirates is a prime example, pledging zero emissions by 2050 – a commitment that is heavily reliant on solar power for future energy production;
  - Jordan has been working on the Reduction and Elimination of Persistent Organic Pollutants Project. To combat the spread of COVID-19 and efficiently dispose of medical waste, four sterilization units were installed in public and military hospitals. Moreover, the project provides technical support to hospitals on waste minimization, recycling, handling, storage, transportation, treatment, disposal options and staff training;
  - The Ministry of Environment of Lebanon has prepared General Guidelines for Municipal Solid Waste Management Under Risks of Covid-19 Outbreak: Collection, Sorting, Treatment and Sanitary Landfilling in Lebanon;
  - Yemen has published a medical waste management plan in response to the pandemic;
  - The State of Palestine is working to update its medical waste management master plan under the European Union-funded “Water and Environment Support (WES) in the ENI Southern Neighbourhood Region” project, to improve overall management and build capacity to react to emergencies and crises, such as the current pandemic.

## Most at risk of being left behind

A detailed review of the Arab region revealed that SDG 12 targets will not be met by 2030 for the following Arab countries and social groups,<sup>1</sup> whose vulnerability has been amplified by the pandemic.

 **Arab least developed countries (LDCs):** These countries suffer from a significant lack of resources and capacity, and need substantial technical support and financial assistance to move towards clean, modern technologies and practices that help achieve sustainable consumption and production.

 **Conflict-affected countries:** Integration of SDG12 into recovery and reconstruction processes in Arab conflict-affected countries is important. Circular models may offer sustainable opportunities in several recovery and reconstruction areas, such as the building sector and recycling. Sustainable public procurement practices could help boost the market and create new sustainable jobs. The food supply chain is another crucial issue that could be linked to biodiversity restoration and climate related issues.

 **Poor communities in informal and unplanned settlements:** These communities bear the brunt of pollution from waste and landfill sites, in addition to water and air pollution. They usually experience low levels of service delivery, including for water, electricity and waste collection, which have deteriorated further because of the pandemic.



**People in need of humanitarian assistance:** the region is home to around 57.1 million people who need humanitarian assistance,<sup>2</sup> including health and sanitation services. In the region, 74 million people are at a higher risk of contracting the virus owing to a lack of handwashing facilities. Poor waste management services have caused additional sanitation issues. Health-care facilities have been suffering from increased pressure, generating additional risks in terms of medical waste management). Mainstreaming SDG 12 targets in humanitarian work is needed.



**Women and children:** Women in the region are highly concentrated in low value-added jobs in the informal sector and in agriculture. Many informal workers in waste collection and recycling are women and children, and are exposed to several health risks. In the context of SDG 12, as labour markets shift, women many not immediately reap the benefits of new employment opportunities owing to gender segregation in labour markets and the relative gender divide in the use of technology in the region. The higher-tech nature of future job opportunities will require greater levels of education that are beyond reach for a disproportionate share of women, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). Although female enrolment in STEM fields exceeds 60 per cent in some universities, it does not translate into employment. Levelling structural inequalities in education and employment requires addressing its primary driver: gender discrimination.

1 ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020.

2 United Nations, Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Arab Region - An Opportunity to Build Back Better, 2020.

## Policy recommendations for ensuring an inclusive recovery and achieving SDG 12 by 2030

Action on SDG12 could be used as an opportunity in the post-pandemic setting to focus on the environmental risks and concerns faced by the Arab region, and trigger a shift in development planning and implementation.

The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 identifies the following recommendations to accelerate the achievement of SDG 12 in the region and support action on other SDGs. These recommendations also facilitate the COVID-19 recovery and enhance resilience to future shocks and crises.<sup>3</sup>

Establish national policies and incentive frameworks for sustainable consumption and production, and enhance public-private partnerships to raise awareness and support sustainable technologies in energy, water, waste and transport

Introduce regulations and incentives to support circular economy practices in national plans and in the building-back-better context, including optimizing resource inputs, maximizing product use, and recovering by-products and waste

Improve knowledge to inform policies and change behaviours in line with sustainable consumption and production, and strengthen the science-policy interface to inform planning and implementation across the SDGs

Mobilize regional and global support to transfer technology, so as to accelerate transformation toward a circular economy, especially in Arab LDCs

3 For a comprehensive analysis of these recommendations, see ESCWA, Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020.



# Key facts on SDG 12

## ARAB REGION

## WORLD

### Material footprint per unit of GDP



**1.10 KG/\$**

was the material footprint per unit of GDP in 2017

**-1.13% since 2000**

**1.15 KG/\$**

was the material footprint per unit of GDP in 2017

**+0.4% since 2000**

### Domestic material consumption per unit of GDP



**0.18 KG/\$**

was the petroleum consumption per unit of GDP in 2016

**0.34% since 2000**

**0.06 KG/\$**

was the petroleum consumption per unit of GDP in 2016

**-0.9% since 2000**

### Number of parties in compliance with Stockholm Convention



**39%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**-1% since 2015**

**50%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**-1% since 2000**

### Number of parties in compliance with Basel Convention



**64%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**+4% since 2015**

**61%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**+1% since 2015**

### Number of parties in compliance with Rotterdam Convention



**62%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**0% since 2015**

**75%**

of countries were compliant in 2020

**+2% since 2015**

Parties meeting their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by Montreal Protocol on hazardous waste, and other chemicals



**100%**  
of countries were compliant in 2020  
**0% since 2015**

**100%**  
of countries were compliant in 2020  
**0% since 2015**

Parties meeting their commitments and obligations in transmitting information as required by Minamata Convention on hazardous waste, and other chemicals



**48%**  
of countries were compliant in 2020

**55%**  
of countries were compliant in 2020

Source: ESCWA Arab SDG Monitor. <http://arabsdgmonitor.unescwa.org>. (Figures have been rounded).