

# THE IMPACT AND OUTLOOK OF THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS ON WATER AND FOOD SECURITY IN THE ARAB REGION

All Arab countries have been impacted by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For most of these countries that were already facing water security and major social, health and economic challenges before COVID-19, this additional pressure is particularly excruciating. The spread in the Arab region so far appears to be controlled and limited, due to rapid national responses and early lockdowns, delays in the introduction of the virus, and an overall low testing rate. However, the outbreak has laid bare inherent weaknesses at the institutional level. Indeed, most countries have reported that their frail health systems would fail to cope with the impacts of the pandemic, and in response used an early window of opportunity to introduce preventive measures which proved effective, so far, in flattening the curve. The link between limiting COVID-19 transmission and access to water and hygiene is crucial, as hand washing with soap and water is key for protection against the virus. As the most water stressed region in the world, the increase in water demand for household and national food production as a result of the outbreak will place increasing pressures on already stressed water systems.

COVID-19 is a deadly reminder that **water and food security matters for all of us**. According to the recent UN ESCWA estimates on the impact of COVID-19, [74 million](#) in the Arab region are at risk due to lack of access to a handwashing facility and [8.3 million people](#) will fall into poverty. The pandemic is also slowing efforts to achieve sustainable development and to deal with the pressing issues of water and food security and ending hunger to millions of people. National lockdowns and social distancing measures are drying up work and incomes, and are likely to disrupt water demand, agricultural production and supply chains. The region imports 65 % of the wheat it consumes and spends around \$110 billion on food imports — leaving millions to worry how they will get enough to eat. Besides, the Arab region is particularly at high risk due to conflict, political instability, economic crisis and climate change.

The main challenge for such Arab countries is “how to balance between domestic water needs and increase consumption as a result of COVID-19 protection measures and at the same time to increase food production .

**As a result of the current coronavirus pandemic and the necessity to better understand, monitor and respond to the situation, the Middle East Water Forum MEWF will host a panel to share insights on the current impact and outlook for water and food security in the Arab region. The webinar will take place on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020, 18.00-19:30 CEST.**

## Agenda

18.00 – 18.05	Introduction by DHI
18.05- 18.10	Opening remarks by H.E. Dr. Hazim Elnaser, Chair of Middle East Water Forum MEWF
18.10 – 18.20	Outline of the panel discussion by Prof. Jamal Saghir, ISID- McGill University, Distinguished Fellow, IFI- American University of Beirut, Advisory board member of MEWF
18.20 – 19.15	<p>Panel discussion chaired by Prof. Jamal Saghir</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane, Chief Water Resources Section, Climate Change and Natural Resource Sustainability Cluster, United Nations Economic &amp; Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).</li> <li>• Dr. Hazim Elnaser, Chair of Middle East Water Forum and Former minister of water resources in Jordan, Former Member of the Jordan's House of Representatives (The Parliament).</li> <li>• Ms. Charafat Afailal, Advisory Board Member of MEWF, Former Minister in charge of water in the Government of Morocco and Expert on water and climate.</li> <li>• Dr. Anders Jagerskog, Senior Water Resources Management Specialist, the World Bank Water Global Practice.</li> <li>• Eng. PMP Hassan Aboelnga, Vice Chair of Middle East Water Forum, Water Security Task Force Member at IWRA. PhD researcher at University of Kassel and Technical University of Cologne.</li> </ul>
19.15 – 19.25	Q&A
19.25 – 19.30	Closing remarks

## Background materials

- THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 on the Water-Scarce Arab region, ESCWA, [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00150\\_covid-19\\_water-scarcity-en.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/20-00150_covid-19_water-scarcity-en.pdf)
- MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 Poverty and food insecurity in the Arab region, ESCWA, [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/en\\_20-00119\\_covid-19\\_poverty.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/en_20-00119_covid-19_poverty.pdf)
- Policy Paper. Preparing for a Looming Water Crisis: Lessons Learned from COVID-19 in the Middle East and North Africa Countries by Pro. Jamal Saghir, et.al. [https://www.mcgill.ca/isid/files/isid/channels/attach/pb-2020-02\\_el\\_amine\\_and\\_saghir.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/isid/files/isid/channels/attach/pb-2020-02_el_amine_and_saghir.pdf)
- OPINION:- Coronavirus - wake-up call to ensure water and sanitation for all by Eng. Hassan Aboelnga, et.al <https://lnkd.in/ekeeBY3>
- Corona's crisis and its impact on food and water shortages in the Arab region in Arabic by Dr. Hazim Elnaser, <https://lnkd.in/dzYvYPu>
- POST COVID-19 NEW WORLD CONFIGURATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTIONS: TWO URGENT PRIORITIES by Prof. Jamal Saghir <https://lnkd.in/dVy5VJ6>

- Risk management and business continuity in water utilities, opportunities and challenges during global crises - Corona pandemic by Dr Jarrah AlZubi. <https://lnkd.in/evuMiW8>
- Status report on the implementation of IWRM in the Arab region, ESCWA <https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/implementation-integrated-water-resources-management-arab-countries-english.pdf>