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SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy in times of crisis in the Arab region

Background note

92%electricity access
(2024)**38.5** millionpeople still without
electricity access**84%**of the population
using clean cooking
fuels (2024)**4.84%**renewable energy
share of total
consumption (2023)

With five years remaining until 2030, the Arab region has expanded access to modern energy, but progress remains insufficient to meet the targets of SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy) on time:

- Electricity access exceeded 92 per cent in 2024,¹ yet 38.5 million people are still left behind.
- Clean cooking progress has stalled, with 84 per cent of the population primarily relying on clean fuels in 2024, while rural gaps persist.
- Renewable energy accounted for only 4.84 per cent of total final energy consumption in 2023.
- Energy efficiency is below the global average, and the region is not yet on track for SDG acceleration, with primary energy intensity at 4.31MJ per 2021 PPP dollar of GDP in 2023.

The recent conflict in the region showed that disruptions to fuel trade, transit corridors and supply chains can raise energy costs and expose the vulnerability of systems that depend on imported fuels. This calls for diversified supply, stronger grids, regional interconnection and contingency planning.

Rising conflict, political instability and debt burdens threaten investment in clean energy infrastructure, deepen inequalities and undermine universal access, particularly in fragile and least developed settings. This underscores the need for inclusive policies and targeted support for rural areas, low-income populations and vulnerable groups.

Closing the 2030 gap also requires a shift from measuring access alone to delivering reliable, affordable and sustainable energy services, backed by stronger governance, investment and regional cooperation.

Baseline assessment

Ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (SDG 7.1)

More than 9 out of 10 inhabitants of the Arab region have access to electricity, with gaps concentrated in least developed

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all data in this document was compiled by ESCWA based on data from the SDG 7 custodian agencies, which include the International Energy Agency (IEA), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the United Nations Statistics Division, the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO). Available at <https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/downloads>.

and fragile contexts. The population remaining without access is likely to live in low-income and conflict-affected countries, as well as in remote areas with higher poverty rates. Rural electrification remains a priority and depends on sustainable, long-term solutions, including transparent arrangements for operation and maintenance, tariffs and service quality.

Reported universal access coexists with chronic outages and shortages, raising concerns about the quality of electricity supply. Beyond access, reliability becomes central; service interruptions undermine welfare, education, health and economic activity, and disproportionately affect women and girls. Addressing reliability requires improving utility governance and operational performance, reducing technical and commercial losses, diversifying supply, and investing in transmission and distribution, with clear accountability for service standards.

Clean cooking remains the region's most persistent access gap for low-income and remote households. Access in urban areas reached 92 per cent in 2024, while it remains at 73 per cent in rural areas. Women and girls bear disproportionate responsibility for cooking and fuel collection and are consequently more exposed to indoor air pollution that affects their health and well-being. Closing the gap requires integrated interventions that address affordability,

clean fuel availability, gender-responsive consumer awareness and protection, and last-mile distribution, including solutions tailored to displaced populations and fragile contexts.

Increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix (SDG 7.2)

Despite significant deployment in a subset of countries, the renewable energy share of total final energy consumption remained low, at around 4.84 per cent in 2023, underscoring that the key challenge is to move from isolated projects to system-wide integration.

Renewable energy trends in the Arab region have remained highly uneven in recent years. In several Arab least developed countries, the use of renewable energy continued to be driven primarily by solid biofuels, while modern renewables, such as solar and wind, were concentrated in a smaller group of countries. Solar energy remained the most widely deployed modern renewable source and showed the broadest uptake across the region, with particularly strong growth in Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, while the United Arab Emirates led solar expansion within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

Wind energy remained limited to a few countries, although Djibouti recorded a particularly sharp increase, and Jordan and Morocco maintained notable shares.

Urban clean cooking

Access in urban areas reached **92 per cent** in 2024, reflecting greater fuel availability and infrastructure in cities.

Rural clean cooking gap

Access remains at just **73 per cent** in rural areas – a persistent and critical equity gap requiring targeted intervention.

Hydropower continued to play a modest role overall and was concentrated mainly in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, with declines observed in some cases, particularly in Iraq. Overall, although

several countries increased their use of modern renewables over the period, progress often started from a low base and remained insufficient to significantly transform the regional energy mix.

The escalating impacts of conflict in the Arab region

The conflict has generated severe and systemic shocks to the energy sector across the Arab region, primarily by disrupting energy trade routes. The near-closure and insecurity of the Strait of Hormuz, through which around 20 million barrels of oil per day normally transit, along with nearly one fifth of global liquefied natural gas trade, have sharply reduced oil and gas exports from Gulf producers; hydrocarbon exports from GCC countries fell by 75–90 per cent at peak disruption.² These supply constraints triggered sharp oil price spikes, soaring freight and war-risk insurance costs, and heightened market volatility.

Import-dependent Arab economies, especially fragile and low-income countries, are experiencing rising inflation, higher subsidy burdens and strained public finances, due to surging fuel and power costs.

The conflict also poses broader supply-chain risks for the energy transition and has increased physical and environmental risks to energy infrastructure. Tightened investment conditions and shipping disruptions delay the movement of industrial inputs, minerals and processed materials needed for clean energy manufacturing and deployment, while slowing progress on renewable project pipelines in import-dependent markets. These disruptions have direct implications for energy security in the Arab region, and threaten progress on regional energy transition initiatives, grid expansion and renewable energy deployment. They also reinforce the region's vulnerability to external energy shocks, strengthening the case for diversified supply, stronger grids, greater regional interconnection and improved contingency planning.

20 million

barrels of oil per day
transit through the
Strait of Hormuz

1/5

of global LNG trade
transiting through
the Strait of Hormuz

75-90%

fall in GCC
hydrocarbon exports
at peak disruption

2. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2026. [Conflict and its shockwaves: escalating impacts and risks for energy, water and food systems in the Arab region](#).

Policy responses to address the risks facing energy systems

Progress on SDG 7 is at risk. Disruptions of conventional fuel supply chains, transit corridors and logistics networks are increasing costs and exposing the vulnerability of systems that depend on imported fuels. To enhance the resilience of regional energy systems, the following measures are recommended:



Accelerate energy transitions and rethink energy systems around renewable-led and resource-efficient infrastructure, prioritizing the rapid deployment of solar and wind energy, distributed energy solutions for critical services, energy-efficient reconstruction of buildings and industry, and flexible generation to ensure a secure and resilient energy supply during post-conflict recovery while locking in long-term sustainability gains.



Strengthen subregional energy interconnection and cooperation to enhance resilience to external shocks by rehabilitating and expanding cross border power links, developing regional balancing and flexibility mechanisms, and tailoring approaches to subregional contexts.



Advance Maghreb clean energy integration to counter supply risks and build long-term resilience by expanding cross-border renewable energy projects (solar, wind, green hydrogen), jointly investing in energy interconnection, and harmonizing regulatory frameworks to create a unified and resilient Maghreb clean energy zone capable of withstanding global market and geopolitical disruptions.



Advance integrated renewable-based solutions for agrifood systems through Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems (WEFE) nexus-informed planning, sustainable bioenergy where appropriate, and stronger alignment of energy, climate and investment policies to improve resilience, food security and access to affordable energy services.



Promote women's leadership in energy governance, transition planning and reconstruction, including representation in regulatory authorities, renewable energy enterprises and regional coordination mechanisms, to facilitate gender-responsive solutions to critical energy policy needs.



Create a regional critical minerals alliance to jointly develop and valorize regional critical energy transition minerals for clean energy supply chains, harmonize regulations and standards to enable cross-border investment, and streamline regional mineral-to-manufacturing value chains.



Build integrated transport, storage and port corridors to secure energy, mineral and food supply chains during geopolitical shocks and ensure uninterrupted flows of staples across the GCC, Mashreq and Maghreb subregions.



Accelerate the digitalization of power systems across Arab subregions through secure, interoperable governance frameworks and integrated regional planning, thereby enhancing real-time monitoring, outage management, predictive maintenance and emergency response.



Strengthen cybersecurity, data governance and coordination by promoting common technical standards, shared data systems, and capacity-building to improve reliability, flexibility and resilience to threats.

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