

THE RIGHT TO WATER
AND CLIMATE CHANGE

2025

THE ARAB WATCH REPORT ON
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

INTRODUCTION TO THE ARAB WATCH REPORT 2025: THE RIGHT TO WATER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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Introduction

The publication of **the Arab Watch Report 2025: The Right to Water and Climate Change** forms part of the ongoing efforts of the Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND) to produce independent, evidence-based critical knowledge that supports rights-based advocacy and strengthens the role of civil society in shaping public policy. Since the launch of the Arab Watch Report initiative in 2011, the Network has sought to shed light on issues related to economic, social, and cultural rights through an approach that links the lived realities of citizens with the economic, social, and environmental policies adopted at the national, regional, and international levels.

This edition builds on a broader body of research and knowledge production led by the Network and its partners across the Arab region. The Arab Watch constitutes one of the principal pillars of this effort, alongside studies and research addressing tax justice, the impact of public debt on economic and social rights, social spending, social protection, food security, informal work, the right to health, and other issues related to social justice and sustainable development.

This work is grounded in the firm conviction that the challenges facing Arab societies cannot be understood or addressed through narrow sectoral or technical approaches. Rather, they require a comprehensive vision that connects economic, fis-

cal, social, and environmental policies with the principles of human rights and social justice. From this perspective, the Network seeks to produce independent critical knowledge that highlights the structural shortcomings of prevailing development models and supports the formulation of more just and sustainable alternatives and policies based on accountability, participation, transparency, and respect for human rights.

The right to water is of particular significance at this critical juncture, not only because of the escalating impacts of climate change across the Arab region, but also because of the structural challenges affecting the management, allocation, and use of water resources. The Arab region is among the most water-stressed regions in the world, while simultaneously facing worsening droughts, rising temperatures, desertification, and ecosystem degradation, alongside increasing pressures driven by population growth, urban expansion, armed conflicts, and unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

The national reports and regional analyses presented in this publication demonstrate that the water crisis in the region cannot be reduced to a question of natural scarcity or merely technical and administrative challenges. At its core, it is a matter of rights, justice, and governance. The denial of access to safe water and adequate sanitation services is often linked

to inequitable patterns of resource management, unequal distribution of public investment, weak accountability and transparency, the growing influence of private economic interests, as well as the impact of wars, occupation, and armed conflicts on infrastructure and natural resources.

Furthermore, the report highlights the close interrelationship between the right to water and broader issues, including climate justice, food security, public health, migration and displacement, poverty, and inequality. It demonstrates that the most vulnerable groups, including rural communities, small-scale farmers, women, refugees, and internally displaced persons, bear the greatest burden of the water crisis and climate change. Ensuring the right to water therefore becomes a fundamental entry point for advancing social justice and realizing economic, social, and cultural rights.

Furthermore, the issue of water in the Arab region cannot be examined in isolation from its geopolitical and sovereignty dimensions. A significant share of Arab water resources is linked to transboundary river basins, rivers, and aquifers, meaning that water management cannot be separated from questions of sovereignty, regional cooperation, and interstate relations. In many parts of the region, control over or access to water resources has been used as an instrument of political and economic domination or coercion, particularly in contexts of occupation and armed conflict. The Palestinian case, in particular, stands as a stark example of the close relationship between the right to water and the right of peoples to self-determination and sovereignty over their natural resources, given the continued restrictions imposed on access to and use of water resources.

The diverse experiences across the Arab region also demonstrate that armed

conflicts and political instability not only destroy water infrastructure but also weaken public institutions and undermine states' capacity to manage natural resources in an equitable and sustainable manner. Ensuring the right to water therefore requires, in addition to appropriate environmental and administrative policies, the promotion of the principles of peace, regional cooperation, adherence to international law, and recognition of peoples' rights over their natural resources as an integral component of the rights to development, justice, and sustainability.

This edition is further distinguished by its adoption of a political economy approach to water, through an analysis of the policies, institutions, and power relations that shape water resource governance and an assessment of their implications for rights, justice, and sustainability. From this perspective, the report calls for moving beyond narrow technocratic approaches and adopting water policies grounded in human rights, democratic participation, and the sustainable and equitable management of natural resources, recognizing water as both a public good and a fundamental human right.

While previous editions of the Arab Watch addressed issues such as social protection, food security, health, and informal work, the focus of this edition on the right to water and climate change reflects a growing recognition of the interdependence of economic, social, and cultural rights. Water is no longer viewed merely as a natural resource or an environmental issue; it has become a central element of food security, public health, climate justice, and sustainable development. It has also emerged as an indicator of the nature of public policies, patterns of resource governance, and the extent of states' commitment to guaranteeing fundamental rights for all citizens and residents without discrimination.

Through its regional analysis, country reports, case studies, and thematic papers, this report seeks not only to document the state of the right to water in the Arab region but also to contribute to the development of more equitable and sustainable policy alternatives and to foster public debate on the relationship between rights, natural resources, development, and climate justice.

In this context, the report emphasizes that the right to water cannot be separated from the right to development, which serves as a comprehensive framework linking the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of development. It affirms the right of peoples to participate in shaping the policies that affect their lives, to benefit equitably from their natural resources, and to enjoy the benefits of development in a fair and sustain-

able manner. Ensuring the right to water is therefore a fundamental component of efforts to build development models that are more equitable and better equipped to address the climate, economic, and social crises confronting the Arab region.

Finally, this publication forms part of the Network's broader vision of strengthening the role of independent knowledge in supporting civil society action and influencing public policy. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to the development of more equitable and sustainable development models founded on human rights, social justice, climate justice, sovereignty over natural resources, and democratic accountability.