UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States

Climate Change Strategy for the Arab Region 2022 - 2025

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Regional Office for Arab States Climate Change Strategy 2022-2025

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Boy carries his brother during flooding in Sudan. Taken by Mazin Mamdouh

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01 Foreword

Aerial view of Al Azhar Park with Darb al-Ahmar on the left ©AKDN, Gary Otte

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Arab countries are witnessing a rapid pace of urban expansion and significant urban population growth. Climate change is the single biggest threat facing humanity today and rapid urbanization is exacerbating the vulnerability of urban dwellers, particularly the urban poor, to the impacts of disasters and climate change. The Sixth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change clearly stated that urbanization has exacerbated the effects of global warming in cities and future exposure to climatic hazards is expected to increase globally due to socio-economic development trends including migration, growing inequality and urbanization.

The MENA/Arab region is one of the most vulnerable regions of the world to the negative impacts of climate change. The increasing frequency of natural disasters and extreme weather events coupled with the social, political, and economic challenges of conflict, increasing poverty, urban expansion, and population growth continue to increase the vulnerability of the region. We are already witnessing the dire impacts on water scarcity, food security and human health, but these impacts are only a fraction of what future generations will have to confront if climate commitments are not turned into tangible actions.

The ways our cities are planned and managed contribute greatly to the level of greenhouse gas emissions. The dependency on fossil fuel for transport and power generation increases in tandem with the growth and expansion of cities. Our mission at UN-Habitat is to promote socially, economically and environmentally sustainable human settlements. This is a critical moment to mobilize our efforts, strengthen our partnerships and leverage innovative tools and approaches to build urban adaptation and climate resilience in hotspots of vulnerability and mainstream climate considerations into local and national urban policies and plans. We, at UN-Habitat, believe that cities are pioneers in testing and implementing innovative, sustainable, and integrated climate solutions. Our Climate Change Strategy for the Arab Region (2022-2025) is grounded in UN-Habitat's commitment to strengthen climate action, improve the urban environment, create sustainable and resource efficient cities, and support member states and local governments in their pathways towards the achievement of the SDGs, implementation of the New Urban Agenda and working towards the Paris Agreement. We hope that the strategy will serve as a guiding document for a collaborative, holistic and multi-sectoral approach to advance urban climate action in the Arab region.

Erfan Ali Regional Representative, UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States



Introduction and Alignment with Global and Regional Agendas

©UN-Habitat, 2015 - Jerusalem, Old City

The Climate Change Challenge in Urban Areas

Cities are the habitats of the future, currently housing more than 50 per cent of the world population, which is expected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. In this era of the triple planetary crisis, cities bear a huge responsibility to both adapt to and mitigate climate change, and reverse biodiversity loss and pollution. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 6th Assessment Report findings came as a warning of the eminent danger that faces humanity, clearly signalling that the time to act was a long time ago and now we are in a race of survival. Responsible for more than 60 per cent of Greenhouse Gas emissions, consuming 78 per cent of global energy while covering only 2 per cent of the planet's surface area [1], cities are both the cause and the solution. Being immobile socio-economic centres, cities need to adapt and build resilience to climate change impacts and extreme weather events including heat waves, droughts, floods,

sea-level rise, sand and dust storms, climate change-induced water scarcity, among others.

The New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, especially the Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) in addition to other goals related to climate change, sustainable consumption and production, decent work and economic growth, and reducing inequalities, are the frameworks that guide UN-Habitat's work on sustainable urban development.

In order to contribute to the battle against climate change, UN-Habitat aligns its efforts with international frameworks including the Paris Agreement's goal of keeping global warming well-below 2°C and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

United Nations, "Generating Power," [Online]. Available: https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/ climate-solutions/cities-pollution. [Accessed June 2022].

Global and Regional Agendas

September, 2015 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

UN-Habitat is the Custodian Agency for SDG-11 and is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities and communities.

December, 2015 Paris Agreement

The Agreement sets long-term goals to limit global warming to well below 2°C while pursuing efforts to limit the increase even further to 1.5°C, review countries' commitments every 5 years and provide financing to developing countries for climate mitigation and adaptation

October, 2016 New Urban Agenda (NUA)

The NUA contains recommendations and commitments that can enable governments across the world to fight inequalities, achieve equitable low or net-zero urban transformations, and improve the quality of live for all.

March, 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

It aims to achieve the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

October, 2015 Regional, Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP)

The 3RP is a strategic, coordination, planning, advocacy, fundraising, and programming platform for humanitarian and development partners to respond to the Syria crisis.

June, 2016

Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030

The Strategy proposes a set of goals and targets to develop the sector of housing and other relevant sectors to achieve integrated, inclusive and sustainable urbanization at the Arab region.



3 Context and Challenges

A camp for IDPs in Libya Photo taken by Malek El Maghrebi

Urban Realities and Challenges in the Arab Region

The Arab region is a rapidly urbanizing region with a population of 444.8 million inhabitants, of which 59 per cent live in urban areas [2]. These figures are expected to rise to 646 million inhabitants, of which 70 per cent will be living in urban areas by 2050 [3]. This rapid growth adds stress on the already limited resources in the region. The Arab region is classified as the most water scarce region in the world, where current water resources utilization rate is estimated at 76.6 per cent compared to a global average of 7.5 per cent [4]. Eighty five percent of water use in the MENA region is utilized by the agriculture sector [5], which implies a room for improvement through more efficient agriculture systems. Water scarcity is a major issue for 19 of the 22 Arab countries, with water availability already worsening due to the impacts of climate change, including changes in precipitation, and increases in temperatures. Seventeen countries in the region also suffer from desertification and land degradation.

On the city scale, the share of public spaces in Arab cities is only 2 per cent of total area as of 2016 compared to an average of 12 per cent in Europe [7]. Moreover, the majority of Arab cities lack access to some basic services including affordable public transport, efficient solid waste management, proper sanitation, among others.

In addition to the growing population and the limited resources stresses, the Arab region is characterized by a high level of ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises, where **58 per cent** of world refugees originated from the region [6]. The region also hosts a large population of refugees and IDPs accounting to **9.3 per cent** of the region's population as of 2019 [7]. The majority of these refugees and IDPs end up living in vulnerable and underserved informal settlements or slums, which already account for an average of **30.9 per cent** of urban dwellers with this figure varying greatly between countries in the region [8].

Environmental and Climate Change Challenges in the Arab Region

Most countries of the Arab region are among the least contributors to climate change, yet they will be among the hardest hit by its impacts. While the effects of climate change vary from one country to another, there are some commonalities within a given region. The Arab region is already known for high temperatures, long summers, and water scarcity issues. Climate change and global warming are already worsening the situation with impacts on public health, water availability, ecosystem services degradation, agriculture, infrastructure, energy consumption, and economic activities. Extreme weather is currently more frequent in the Arab region, characterized by extreme temperatures and shorter but more intense precipitation periods [9].

Moreover, Arab countries are net food importers, with food imports accounting for 13 per **cent** of total imports compared to the global average of **8 per cent** [10]. This is negatively affected by climate change impacts in exporting countries, as well as other geopolitical stressors. In addition to water shortages, desertification, land degradation, heatwaves and other climate change impacts, food security is being hit by several issues in the region including the tenure insecurity and increasing fragmentation of agricultural land holdings, the reliance on imports and urbanisation into agricultural lands. Moreover, similar to other coastal countries. Arab countries are at a high risk of flooding and saltwater intrusion especially in river deltas, due to sea-level rise, which will affect more than 43 port cities in the region.

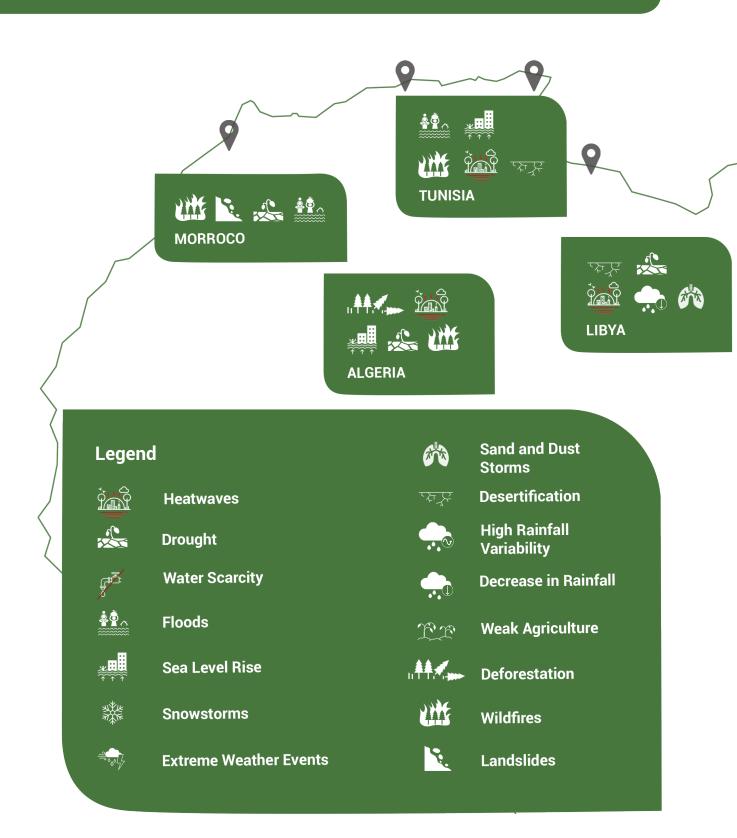
All Arab countries suffer from air pollution according to the World Health Organization's guidelines on particulate matter concentrations in the air, while 11 out of the 22 Arab countries exceed the world average of particulate matter concentration [11]. As a result, 5 Arab countries are ranked among the top 10 polluted countries worldwide and 3 Arab countries are among the top 10 countries with the most deaths from air pollution [8].

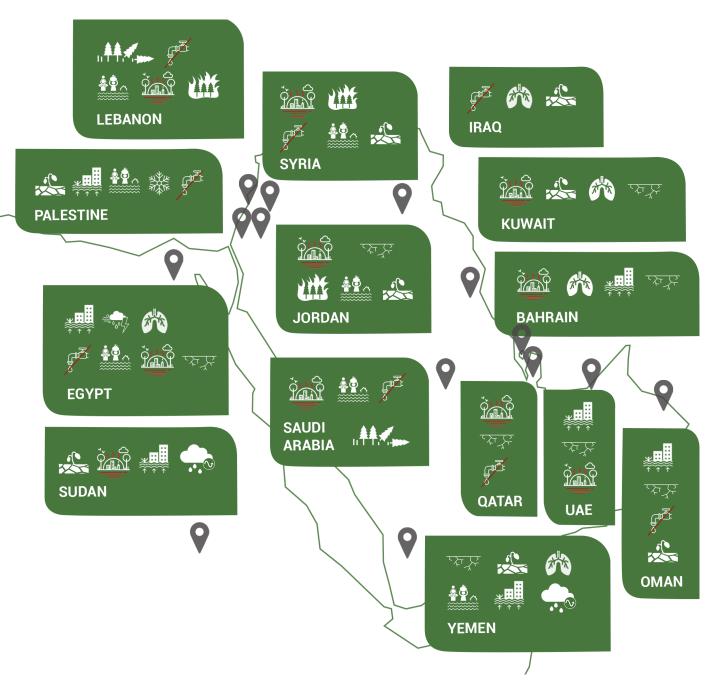
While the share of GHG emissions from the Arab region is considered low, CO2 emissions have increased by **81 per cent** between the years 2000 and 2014 [6]. Certain urban sectors are the cause of these emissions, for instance, **25 per cent** of CO2 emissions in the region are produced by the transport sector [8], where private vehicles are the main mode of transport. As for the housing and building sector, it accounts for around 20 per cent of emissions [13].

The impacts of climate change manifest disproportionately on the different types of urban dwellers, with women, children, refugees, IDPs, and older persons being the most negatively affected.

- [2] Arab Development Portal, "Arab Development Portal," UNDP, February 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.arabdevelopmentportal.com/indicator/ demography. [Accessed June 2022].
- [3] B. Mirkin, "Population Levels, Trends and Policies in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities," UNDP, 2010.
- [4] UN-Habitat, "World Cities Day celebrations at Expo 2020 Dubai," UN-Habitat, 30 October 2021. [Online]. Available: https://unhabitat.org/world-cities-daycelebrations-at-expo-2020-dubai. [Accessed June 2022].
- [5] H. Aboelnga and A. Soliman, "Coming to grips with urban water security in the face of climate change in the Arab World," Smart Water Magazine, 2 February 2022.
- [6] UNESCWA, "Arab Sustainable Development Report," UNESCWA, 2020.
- [7] Arab Development Portal, "Arab Region in Review 2017," Arab AID and UNDP, 2017.
- [8] UNFPA Regional Office for Arab States, "Migration," UNFPA, 28 May 2020. [Online]. Available: https:// arabstates.unfpa.org/en/topics/migration-1. [Accessed 13 June 2022].
- [9] United Nations Statistics Division, "Statistical Database," 2021. [Online]. Available: https://unstats. un.org/home/. [Accessed June 2022].
- [10] Arab Development Portal, "Trade," Arab Aid and UNDP, November 2020. [Online]. Available: https:// www.arabdevelopmentportal.com/indicator/trade. [Accessed June 2022].
- [11] The World Bank, "World Development Indicators," 2021. [Online]. Available: https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators. [Accessed June 2022].

Impacts of Climate Change on the Region





International Climate Change Commitments in the Region

In terms of national-level climate change commitments, the majority of Arab countries have submitted their NDCs (16 countries) while 4 countries have submitted INDCs and only two countries (Libya and Yemen) with no official INDC or NDC submissions. UN-Habitat has provided support to NDCs update/development in Bahrain, and Lebanon. Moreover, UN-Habitat is committed to providing support to the development of National Adaptation Plans in Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, with support already provided in Jordan and Palestine.

04 Call to Action

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After view, Improving the well-being of host and refugee populations through funding from SDC,Tripoli, Lebanon

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UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Under its current Strategic Plan 2020-2025, the vision of UN-Habitat is to achieve "a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world". This vision is encapsulated in the Plan's 4 domains of change namely:

- 1. Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban - rural continuum
- 2. Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions
- 3. Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment
- 4. Effective urban crisis prevention and response.

In the third domain of change, UN-Habitat is committed to support Member States in undertaking climate action and improving the urban environment. UN-Habitat is also committed to work together with its partners to mainstream environmental considerations into local, national, and regional urban policymaking and enhance awareness of climate change matters and disseminate knowledge and best practices to support the implementation of climate change strategies.

Three outcomes frame UN-Habitat's Climate Change Strategy for Arab States:

- 1. Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved air quality
- 2. Improved resource efficiency and protection of ecological assets
- 3. Effective adaptation of communities and infrastructure to climate change



In 2021, UN-Habitat made a leap forward by introducing the third version of its **Environmental Social Safeguard System (ESSS)** as a tool to prevent and mitigate undue harm to people and the environment and maximize environmental and social benefits throughout the agency's projects and programmes. The ESSS is currently streamlined in project and programme development and implementation

Objective

To curb the impact of climate change on Arab cities and communities through resilience building, reduction of urban vulnerabilities, advancing adaptation and mitigation actions for the development of sustainable cities and mainstreaming climate considerations in urban policies and plans

Thematic Areas

ply in the Arab region has grown steadily in the last decades. This is in addition to the higher frequency and intensity of floods and flash floods. UN-Habitat is committed to support urban water resilience through integrated water resources Water management, innovation in water technology, nature-based solutions and resil-Security ient infrastructure, and water-sensitive urban planning

Green Recon-

Post-conflict and crises recovery and reconstruction could be seen as an opportunity to build back better, greener and more resilient. UN-Habitat is keen to leverage bespoke tools and approaches to support post-conflict and post-crises struction and sustainable recovery and reconstruction in the built environment and main-**Rehabilitation** stream climate considerations in the recovery and reconstruction processes

As the most water-stressed region in the world, the demand for urban water sup-



UN-Habitat will continue to advocate for the adoption of renewable energy generation in urban areas, using solar rooftops on public buildings and in hous-Transition and ing projects. UN-Habitat will also continue to support the shift to low-carbon, Energy accessible, affordable and inclusive public transport, integrated with better facili-Efficiency ties for walking and cycling



UN-Habitat is committed to raising urban resilience and adaptive capacities of cities and communities. This includes designing and implementing urban Urban nature-based solutions and green infrastructure; and reducing waste generation **Resilience** by reducing, reusing and recycling waste in an efficient and sustainable manner.

Sustainable Urban Food

As food systems are under pressure in the Arab region, UN-Habitat is keen to better understand urban food systems and the interactions between all the components involved in the production, processing, distribution, consumption and **Systems** waste of food and enhance urban-rural linkages to shorten supply chains.

Sustainable Land Management

Sustainable land management has a key role in climate change. Climate resilience is higher in communities with land tenure security and adequate housing. The good management of urban and peri-urban land prevents and addresses unregulated urban sprawl into agricultural land. UN-Habitat advocates for sustainable land management for compact development and the reduction of environmental impacts.

Cross-Cutting Themes: Gender, Human Rights, Children, Youth and Older Persons and Disability



UN-Habitat's Response

Syrian women cleaning public space, Aleppo, Syria, @UN-Habitat Al Shaima' Con munity Garden, Gaza Ship © Palestinian Housing Council 2018 Solar panels installed on roof of National HIV and TB Centre funded by Sida, Lebanon ©UN-Habitat Home-Garden Interventions, Palestine ©UN-Habitat

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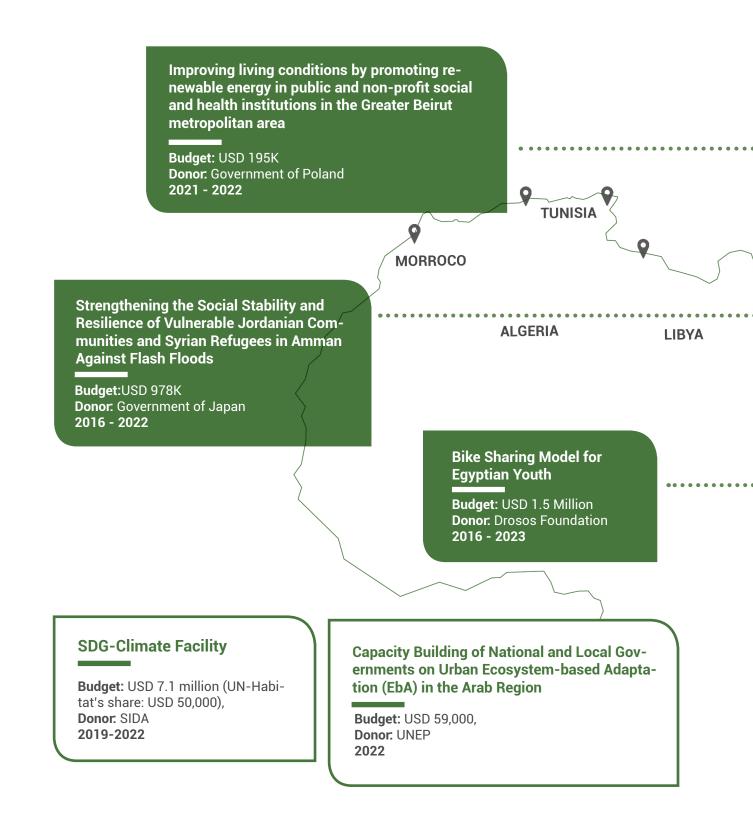
UN-Habitat is mandated to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. Given that climate change is both affected by and affects cities and urban areas, UN-Habitat integrates climate change issues in its response with projects either integrating climate change aspects or entirely focusing on adaptation and/or mitigation.

One of the five UN-Habitat Flagship programmes, the **Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor (RISE UP) Flagship programme,** focuses on urban adaptation and resilience-building in vulnerable informal settlements whose inhabitants are among the most susceptible to climate change. Other climate change initiatives for this Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs focus on accelerating local climate finance, providing policy advisory for multi-level climate action governance, and facilitating innovative solutions.

For more information on the Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor (RISE UP) Flagship programme, visit <u>https://unhabitat.org/programme/rise-up-resilient-settlements-forthe-urban-poor</u> or scan this QR code:



Previous and Current Climate Change Projects in the Region

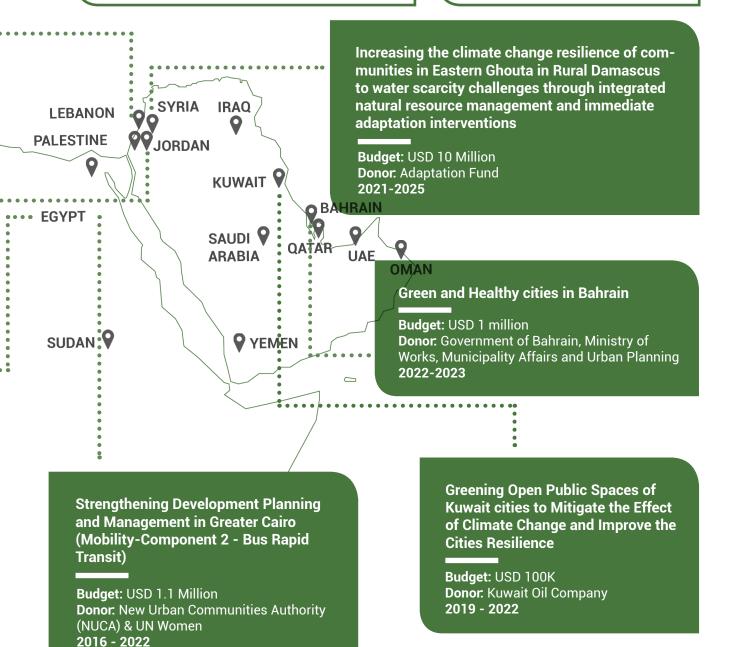




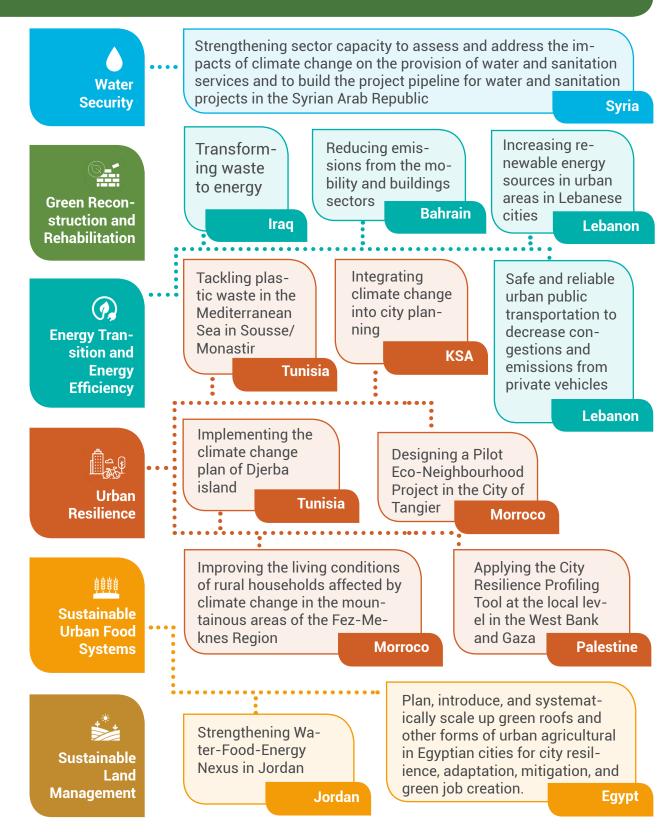
Budget: USD 14 million Donor: Adaptation Fund 2021-2025

Improved Resilience to Transboundary Sand and Dust Storms in Kuwait and Iraq

Budget: USD 13.4 million Donor: KFAED 2021-2025



Future Proposals and Pipeline Projects



Normative Measures to Support Implementation



Data: Contributing to the generation of region-specific climate change data, maps, guides, and tools to make policy recommendations and facilitating access to climate change data.



Innovation: Creating mediums and platforms for Innovation and technology transfer and fostering innovative solutions for urban and climate problems



Capacity Development: Building capacities of government partners, especially on climate change related issues such as vulnerability assessment, climate fund acquisition, etc.



Awareness raising: Raising awareness of populations and sometimes governments on the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change.



Mainstreaming climate change into policies and plans: mainstreaming climate change into national policies and local plans as well as mainstreaming urban issues into climate change policies.

Positioning UN-Habitat's Climate Change Action in the Arab Region

AlZohour Green Triangle Flashfloods project in Amman Jordan - Photographer Yasmine Mostafa

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UN-Habitat has a strong presence in the Arab region with projects being implemented and policy advisory being provided in 18 countries. While UN-Habitat is physical present in 13 countries with country offices in Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. With pilot projects that can be replicated and scaled-up and regional frameworks through which urban recovery can be greener, UN-Habitat ROAS has established a base of best practices that can support climate change adaptation and mitigation in the region.

Current Regional Climate Change Portfolio:



(Note: This figure covers on-going programmes and projects primarily focusing on environment and climate change)

Best practices in the region

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Zero-Emission Mobility Introducing bikesharing systems involving smart solutions for operations and M&E of project performance and mitigation impact in Cairo, Egypt and Tyre, Lebanon



Green Recovery and Reconstruction Application of Green Building concepts and technologies in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of buildings and pu blic facilities in Iraq and Lebanon



Green Public Spaces Designing and implementing green public spaces in more than 12 cities



Rubble to Mountains Initiative

In response to the Beirut port explosion, the initiative collected over 200,000 tons of rubble and glass Reused and recycled to mend the Lebanese mountains, build furniture for Beirut's public spaces and establish a permanent site for sustainable disposal and processing of C&D waste



Al Zohour Green Triangle

Implementing a Nature-based Solutions pilot project to enhance the adaptive capacity of the city of Amman to flash floods through stormwater bioretention and detention



Community-level Urban Farming Home farming initiative for elderly people in 60 vulnerable households in Palestine as a sustainable and organic source of food production and a coping strategy against COVID-19 restrictions

In addition to global initiatives and campaigns, UN-Habitat has developed climate change guides and tools that aim to support climate change stakeholders, including national government, local governments, urban planners, and climate change projects designers in their fight against climate change. These include guides on how to integrate urban issues in NDCs and how to integrate climate action into NUPs. UN-Habitat is supporting the development and endorsement of NUPs in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Tunisia.

Global initiatives, Knowledge Products and Climate Change Tools

Global Initiatives and Campaigns

Cities and Climate Change Initiative (CCCI)





Climate Action 4 Cities Campaign



Integrating Climate Change into City Development Strategies (CDS)

Climate Change Vulnerability and Risk: A Guide for Com-

munity Assessments, Action

Planning and Implementation



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CLIMATE CHANGE



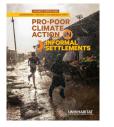
Knowledge Products, Guides, and Tools

Developing Local Climate Change Plans: A Guide for Cities in Developing Countries





Pro-Poor Climate Action in Informal Settlements





Multilevel Governance for effective urban related climate action in the Global South





Gender and Urban Climate Policy



Addressing Urban and Human **Settlement Issues in National Adaptation Plans**





Addressing Urban Issues in National Climate Change Policies







Guiding Principles for City Cli-

mate Action Planning (En-Ar)



Land Tenure and Climate Vulnerability (GLTN, UN-Habitat, **RMIT University in Melbourne** Australia)





😵 GLTN RMIT



Local Climate Action in the Arab region





Study on Land, Natural Resources and Climate Change in the Arab Region: Tenure Security Issues and Challenges

The Nexus Between Land Degradation and Land-Related Conflict

Master Tool on Climate Change: Flagship 3 RISE UP - Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor





City Resilience Profiling Programme: Climate Action Enhancer



Law and Climate Change

Toolkit





Addressing Climate Change in National Urban Policy: A **Policy Guide for Low-Carbon** and Climate-Resilient Urban Development





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Sustainable Reconstruction & Recovery Framework for The Southern & Eastern Mediterranean





Planning for Climate Change: A strategic, Values-based Approach for Urban Planners

Volume 1: Guide:



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Volume 2: Toolkit:







Enhancing Nationally Deter-

mined Contributions through

Urban Climate Action (Guide)



Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Manual



Placemaking Toolkit: Designing People Places - A toolkit for communities and designers to design and implement public spaces and buildings in Palestine



City Resilience Action Planning Tool (CityRAP Tool)





Concerted efforts and strategic cross-sectoral partnerships are necessary for combating climate change. UN-Habitat ROAS aims to capitalize on its experience and successful partnerships with local and national governments in the region and collaborate with climate change stakeholders to support urban resilience, adaptation, and mitigation in the Arab region. Moreover, of this strategy within the framework of One United Nations, in cooperation with all UN agencies concerned with climate action.

Through this strategy, UN-Habitat ROAS plans on strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ones with all climate change stakeholders including local communities, academia, and international and local NGOs and CSOs.



Financing the implementation of the Regional Climate Change Strategy

Despite the increase in available finance for adaptation, the adaptation finance gap is still not closing. However, implementation of adaptation actions is increasing worldwide, backed by the Adaptation Fund, the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Facility and bilateral public funding.

UN-Habitat will drive the development, implementation and monitoring of programmes, projects and initiatives in conjunction with a wide range of esteemed partners and stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the Regional Climate Change Strategy.

The implementation leading to the achievement of the strategy outcomes is estimated at USD 100 million. UN-Habitat will capitalize on its experience in mobilizing climate finance through different financial mechanisms and partnering with climate investors, both public and private. UN-Habitat will also ensure expanding resource mobilization to unconventional funding sources, such as foundations, the private sector, emerging donor countries and blended finance, and strengthening joint programming with UN organizations and leveraging partnerships with local and regional government and other development actors and stakeholders.



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A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world





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