



WATER  
SCARCITY





Water scarcity can mean scarcity in availability due to physical shortage, or scarcity in access due to the failure of institutions to ensure a regular supply or due to a lack of adequate infrastructure.

Water scarcity already affects every continent. Water use has been growing globally at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century, and an increasing number of regions are reaching the limit at which water services can be sustainably delivered, especially in arid regions.

---

## Challenges

Water scarcity will be exacerbated as rapidly growing urban areas place heavy pressure on neighbouring water resources. Climate change and bio-energy demands are also expected to amplify the already complex relationship between world development and water demand.

---

## Opportunities

There is not a global water shortage as such, but individual



*Water Distribution by UNAMID in Tora Northern Darfur*  
Water is being distributed by an African Union-United Nations Hybrid operation in Darfur (UNAMID) contingent from Rwanda in Tora, Northern Darfur. The closest water source is 1.5 hours away and donkeys are regularly used to transport water to the village.  
UN Photo/Olivier Chassot

countries and regions need to urgently tackle the critical problems presented by water stress. Water has to be treated as a scarce resource, with a far stronger focus on managing demand. Integrated water resources management provides a broad framework for governments to align water use patterns with the needs and demands of different users, including the environment.

---

## Facts and figures

- Around 1.2 billion people, or almost one-fifth of the world's population, live in areas of scarcity. Another 1.6 billion people, or almost one quarter of the world's population, face economic water shortage (where countries lack the necessary infrastructure to take water from rivers and aquifers). ([FAO, 2007](#))
- Around 700 million people in 43 countries suffer today from water scarcity. ([Global Water Institute, 2013](#))
- Two thirds of the world's population currently live in areas that experience water scarcity for at least one month a year. ([Mekonnen and Hoekstra, 2016](#))
- By 2025, 1.8 billion people are expected to be living in countries or regions with absolute water scarcity, and two-thirds of the world population could be under water stress conditions. ([UNESCO, 2012](#))
- With the existing climate change scenario, by 2030, water scarcity in some arid and semi-arid places will displace between 24 million and 700 million people. ([UNCCD](#)).
- A third of the world's biggest groundwater systems are already in distress ([Richey et al., 2015](#)).
- Nearly half the global population are already living in potential waterscarce areas at least one month per year and this could increase to some 4.8–5.7 billion in 2050. About 73% of the affected people live in Asia (69% by 2050) ([Burek et al., 2016](#)).

---

## Find out more:

FAO: [Aquastat](#)

FAO (2016): [Coping with water scarcity in agriculture: a global framework for action in a changing climate](#)

FAO (2008): [Coping with water scarcity: An action framework for agriculture and food security](#)

UNESCO (2006): [World Water Development Report 2006: 'Water: a shared responsibility'](#)

UNDP (2006): [Human Development Report 2006: 'Beyond scarcity: Power, poverty and the global water crisis'](#)

UN-Water Activity Information System: [National Drought Management Policies Initiative](#)

World Resources Institute: [Blog: What we know about water scarcity](#)

---