

The impact of regional conflicts and geopolitics on Jordan's water cost



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Jordan is the second most water scarce country worldwide with only 65 cubic meters of renewable water resources are available per person annually, which is significantly below the 500 cubic meters threshold of 'absolute water scarcity'. The situation exacerbated further with the limited water supply options, climate change (by 2040, climate change models suggest precipitation will be 15–25% less than today), as well as transboundary issues related to the Jordan River and its attribute "the Yarmouk", overpumping of precious groundwater resources, and the rapid increase in population due to the influx of refugees from neighboring countries, which have resulted in severe challenges to the national water security and the sustainability of its valuable water resources. The country's renewable water resources from both surface and groundwater meets about 60% of water demand for the various uses with current water-stress levels (water withdrawal in proportion to available renewable resources) of 100%.

Jordan struggles to conserve its resources and avoid water scarcity impact on WASH services and economic growth through sustainable responses that include demand management, new water supply projects and combating climate change. Regional tensions and geopolitical uncertainties across the Middle East hindered Jordan from implementing its low-cost programs to restore its water rights agreements, in particular, from Syria and Israel, and thus forced to choose more expensive options that are faraway from demand centers e.g. "The National Water Conveyance Project".

Today, the cost of water per cubic meter is approximately 2.15 JD including debt services and water losses, where the average revenue from tariffs is about 1.15 JD per cubic meter. The government currently provides a subsidy of roughly 1.0 JD per cubic meter, which helps to alleviate the cost burden on low-income consumers. The government's subsidy, even with reasonable future increases in water tariffs, is expected to double or triple, once large-scale water transfer projects, such as "The National Water Conveyance Project" are

completed. However, it is not feasible solution, to increase the current water tariffs by 200% or 300%, bearing in mind that the vast majority of subscribers are low-income people and fall within the lowest water use block i.e less than 18m³/ month, which currently averages about 0.48 JD per cubic meter for water and sanitation services.

The current and future costs of water per cubic meter pose significant concerns regarding the fiscal budget's capacity to subsidize these costs and the affordability issue by majority of consumers given the current consumption patterns and financial constraints.

Jordan's role as the first defense line for refugees seeking asylum in Western countries has been invaluable to the international community. However, this responsibility has placed immense pressure on the country's water resources with profound impact on water costs. Continued support from donor countries is essential to ensure that Jordan can maintain its water sector and continue to provide for both its citizens and the refugees. By investing in financial aid, technological assistance, and capacity-building initiatives, donor countries can help Jordan overcome its water challenges and ensure a sustainable future for all by backing government efforts to secure more concessional funds to large-scale water projects.

Looking ahead, Jordan's ability to navigate regional tensions and geopolitical challenges will be crucial for its future water resources supply sustainability and development . While Jordan has demonstrated resilience, adaptability and progress in SDGs achievements, the path forward will require more generous international finance, effective governance, and innovative solutions to the myriad challenges posed by the region's complex geopolitical landscape.