

YOUTH: A LEVERAGE FACTOR FOR THE WATER SECURITY AND CLIMATE NEXUS-CASE OF NORTH AFRICA

WATER POLICY BRIEF

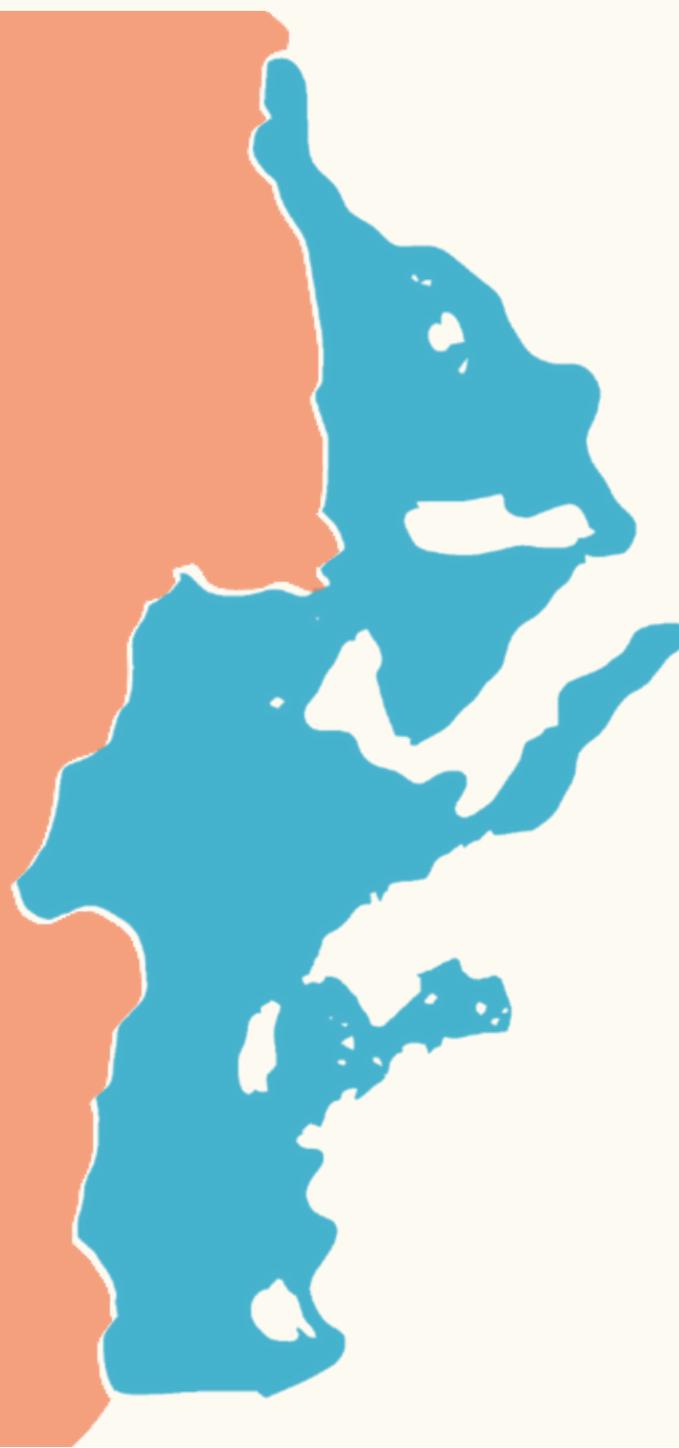


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KEY MESSAGES

- Awareness-raising and management to make water security and migration more climate-resilient are crucial at all levels.
- Government-awarded prizes should aim to encourage youth innovation by rewarding their involvement in sustainable projects on water-related issues (security, climate change, access, etc.) in the Maghreb region.
- Future water leaders should be trained by encouraging young people's innovative ideas, incubation, and acceleration in an institutional framework to ensure water security in a sustainable and safe environment.
- Youth participation in the decision-making process should be encouraged by involving them in a shadow cabinet that mimics the official government, analysing its policies and actions and offering alternatives.
- More research and studies are needed to support the development of effective responses and policies to deal with the nexus impacts of water security.
- It is vital to communicate with stakeholders and young entrepreneurs in the region to foster cooperation and find more sustainable water security solutions by encouraging group discussions, funding opportunities, etc.
- Data should be gathered and analysed to better understand the profile of migrants and whether they are migrating due to water security or climate change.



SUMMARY

This policy brief is based on the Center for Mediterranean Integration's (CMI) flagship report on "The Water Security Nexus in North Africa – Catalyzing Regional Coordination Around Climate Change, Resilience and Migration" project, prepared by the CMI team and commissioned by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). This project uses a nexus approach to study the links between water security, climate change and migration. This policy brief is a youth-driven analysis of the uncertainty surrounding climate trends and the complex nature of the migration conditions that are posing a great challenge for policymakers in the North Africa region. It seeks to provide insights from youth into the region's complex climate, water and migration nexus to help inform policymakers and future development interventions. Policy recommendations include developing government policies coherent with the nexus, strengthening regional cooperation and investing in youth initiatives.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE WATER SECURITY NEXUS IN NORTH AFRICA

Water scarcity leads to many uncertainties about our future. Only one thing is certain: we will leave this planet to our children, youth and future generations. Young people are increasingly aware of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the necessary transition towards access to water for all, water security, and equal opportunities for youth in towns and cities that will limit or reduce the phenomenon of rural exodus. Many are joining the global dialogue on possible solutions, getting involved and taking action. The efforts of these young people, who are working around the world to build their future by tackling water scarcity and ensuring water security, are an inspiration to all of us.

This policy brief is timely. **The work undertaken by and for youth is essential if real political ambition is to be created to achieve a new regional agreement on the water security nexus.**

This new generation is increasingly aware of social and environmental issues. It has the energy and knowledge necessary to lead our societies towards a future characterized by equal opportunities for youth in towns and cities and greater resistance to water scarcity. Young people play an active role at the local, national and global levels in raising awareness

of water scarcity and submitting proposals for water efficiency and consumption projects. These projects focus on the situation of youth in the towns and what motivates them to migrate and contribute to providing solutions to reduce this phenomenon, adopting environmentally friendly practices and implementing adaptation and mitigation projects. The work undertaken by and with youth is critical if we are to push governments to agree on a new water nexus regime by 2030.

ENGAGING YOUTH TO PROMOTE THE WATER SECURITY NEXUS IN NORTH AFRICA

Water scarcity is a brutal reality that younger generations will face in the decades to come. Mobilizing our generation to tackle water security makes sense, as we will suffer most directly from the consequences of climate change.

To help raise awareness among young people, the CMI team organized the first youth regional workshop in the Mediterranean region entitled “Water Security Nexus in North Africa: Catalyzing Regional Coordination Around Climate Change, Resilience and Migration,” funded by FCDO. The workshop aimed to amplify young people’s voices on water-related challenges and allow them to present their commitments to and proposals for regional water security.

This workshop contributed to the consolidation and framing of youth perspectives, allowing young people to present their proposals for the realization of a water nexus to regional actors. These proposals included better integration of youth concerns in economic, political, strategic and institutional frameworks, and initiatives to promote integrated investments in water security, climate change and migration in North Africa.

CHALLENGES AND GAPS FACED BY YOUTH

At present, multi-actor approaches are multiplying, and young people are more present in the field of water. Images of young people are increasingly present and are often used as part of awareness-raising efforts in various communication campaigns in the water sector and migration. We give the floor to young people, but do we listen to them? Youth are able to question the credibility of such campaigns: is their image simply used as a display of multi-actor governance? Or do these campaigns recognize a certain vision or even certain expertise that young people have?

As part of efforts to ensure water security and combat migration in the Mediterranean region in general and the Maghreb countries in particular, youth face several challenges, both external and internal. These are obstacles to their effective contribution to achieving water security and mitigating the effects of climate change and the resulting increase in migration.

Some specific external challenges that youth in the region face include intergenerational barriers, vulnerability to political manipulation, unstable political youth culture, youth diversity management and discrimination. Many government actors and communities also distrust young people. Their lack of environmental and political culture is a major obstacle to their effective participation in governmental political dialogues, as it leaves them unable to engage decision-makers and participate in decision-making.

On the other hand, internal challenges faced by youth relate to their inherent shortcomings in organizational and human capacity. These include limited access to funding, technology and resources and limited peer-to-peer collaboration. Most youth-led groups in the region report a lack of funding, with many almost entirely dependent on their own funding to survive. Limited funding also has implications for youth groups' technical, logistical and operational capacities. Often, they are not able to design and develop funding proposals independently, communicate their ideas to potential partners or even implement and realize their ideas given the limited funding opportunities available.

Finally, they are constrained by a lack of or limited, peer-to-peer collaboration which would enable them to save money by availing themselves of the few resources at their disposal. Youth groups often work in silos, in competition with or against each other. In addition, youth groups' limited trust in each other hinders opportunities to collaborate and create synergies to implement large-scale and impactful programmes. The lack of transparency in the process of selecting their leaders sometimes exposes these groups to bitter rivalries, divisions and conflicts that distract them from their set goals. Ultimately, the external

challenges and internal contradictions that youth groups regularly face end up limiting what they can do or achieve in the medium to long term.

Youth play a key role in raising public awareness and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to eradicating poverty, water security and the fight against climate change. In recent years, the youth involved in MedYWat has been committed to these issues and mobilized to tackle them.

CONCLUSION: LEVERAGING RESULTS INTO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this work recommends first building government policies that are coherent with the nexus. While countries have made progress in natural resources management and wastewater reuse, authorities must also draft laws and precise implementing guidelines to both improve water quality and organize wastewater treatment and reuse. Governments can also play a key role in improving public participation in water planning and management and learning from it.

Public participation is essential for effective and adaptive water management. This brief also recommends strengthening regional cooperation by capitalizing on the European Union's experience improving water quality in the southern and eastern Mediterranean and setting up a platform for cooperation and knowledge-sharing at the territorial level. Overall, the need to strengthen the skills of local decision-makers and all of their services is a crucial issue for countries in the region (Quefelec *et al.* 2021). Finally, this paper recommends investing in youth initiatives and supporting and empowering them to drive the transformation required to improve water security in the region. This can be done by recognizing the role of youth-led organizations and national and international non-governmental youth organizations; strengthening collaboration with policymakers; creating national and subnational working groups on water; capitalizing on regional youth networks (such as the MedYWat and its sub-chapters); helping young people develop the skills and experience needed for both traditional and new jobs; exploring joint programmes in association with international graduate water education facilities; facilitating youth connections with academia, and providing financial support to youth-led research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are a few policy recommendations for managers and policymakers responsible for ensuring water security and migration mitigation in rural areas affected by the impacts of climate change. They are based on the research paper *The Water Security Nexus in North Africa – Catalyzing Regional Coordination Around Climate Change, Resilience and Migration*. These recommendations will ensure that their strategies and programmes take better account of the water sector.

Actions targeting youth:

- Invest in North African youth and give them the opportunity to present and develop alternatives and innovative solutions, under the supervision of regional and international experts, to address the scarcity of water resources that is increasing with population growth and rural migration. In this regard, we recommend launching a Maghrebi youth initiative to preserve the environment, aimed at helping the government support environmental issues and share experiences. The initiative could be developed first at the national level within each country and, at a later stage, merged into one regional platform. It is important to make use of social media tools and other media platforms to promote youth initiatives in the region. This will enable younger generations to learn more about water conflicts by providing information about projects and initiatives targeting these issues to encourage future thinkers and leaders to create more sustainable solutions.
- Organize international conferences on water, climate and migration issues to help build more bridges between researchers around the world. Our region currently lacks certain programmes and a single database that could connect more regional and international water experts, entrepreneurs, journalists and people working in other fields related to these causes. These conferences will increase collaboration because they will attract the attention of the world, and hence will put the spotlight on these issues affecting the Maghreb. Indeed, the interrelationship between water security, food security, energy security, climate and migration should be the focus of Maghreb water strategies. There is also potential for building a network or foundations.
- Develop water solutions within the context of climate change and mitigation approaches by organizing leadership training workshops designed to accelerate collaborative innovation, fast-track global knowledge-sharing and devise innovations that improve water security. Such workshops encourage future water leaders to think holistically, design innovatively, and communicate effectively across cultures. They aim to develop youth capacities, empower women and create innovative leaders within the water sector in the Maghreb. We should encourage a wider set of ministries and local and national public bodies in urban and rural municipalities – in

particular, those in charge of the water, health and housing sectors – to participate in this training, labs, events and regional and global climate-change workshops.

- Encourage youth participation in decision-making by training young people as shadow ministers. They could be involved in forming a shadow cabinet that mirrors the positions of each member of the official cabinet. Their areas of responsibility, in parallel with the official ministers, may be referred to as a “shadow portfolio”. Members of this shadow cabinet would have no executive power. It would be their responsibility to scrutinize the policies and actions of the government, as well as to offer alternative policies and develop institutional legislations and arrangements necessary to support local irrigation projects using systems that are tailored to the farms. Shadow ministers would be able to push for water diplomacy, i.e. the use of scientific approaches in the water field to assist policymaking.
- Direct youth towards better education by providing extension services, online courses or short curriculums to increase their knowledge of water management and water engineering. While building their capacities, we could introduce new technologies to their areas – such as water desalination technology in the areas studied that suffer from water scarcity – and encourage the reuse of wastewater in irrigation, in addition to the desalination of seawater and the return to traditional practices to protect groundwater. Finally, we could introduce modern irrigation technologies, financing, and investment mechanisms. All national water strategies must include a wastewater reuse strategy, and all relevant authorities and policymakers must comply with it.

Actions targeting decision-makers:

- Encourage a wider set of ministries and local and national public bodies in urban and rural municipalities – in particular, those in charge of the water, health and housing sectors – to participate in events and regional and global climate-change workshops.
- Use accepted scientific observations and projections of the effects of climate change to establish criteria and develop a set of priorities for water security interventions in specific hotspots – the poorest, most exposed and most vulnerable rural populations – and in areas where there are large-scale population displacements.
- Continue to encourage the refinement of climate-change projections and the regionalization of relevant climate data. Help overcome observation differences in Maghreb countries by funding the expansion of hydrological and meteorological observation networks so that climate data are available and shared within and between countries and support informed decisions in the water sector.
- Develop adaptation strategies at the Maghreb regional level to maximize the effectiveness of adaptation measures and prevent the negative effects of unilateral

measures by giving the organizations responsible in each country the means to meet the challenges of climate change.

- Ensure that the role of water in climate-change mitigation and migration is well represented in climate-related debates and agreements as a means to achieve targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions that negatively affect production and development in rural areas. This includes the restoration and preservation of degraded eco-hydrological systems. All climate-change measures and plans, including national and regional development strategies, should include water protection. As sanitation interventions have significant mitigation and adaptation potential, these should also be considered, specifically in rural areas. Encourage the production of documents on best practices and lessons learned from these experiences.
- Encourage innovation, foster capacity-building and raise awareness of adaptive water management, including the importance and benefits of transboundary cooperation, to ensure that agreements, monitoring mechanisms and solutions to ensure water security is effective.
- Promote and develop data and knowledge-sharing practices at the Maghreb regional level so that new information and lessons learned can be evaluated, taken into account and included in management methods at all levels. Extend the use of citizen science to collect data and implement projects on the ground.
- Build the capacity of institutions to use existing risk-based approaches to climate-change mitigation and adaptation at decision-making and operational levels to ensure that the decisions taken today do not aggravate the difficulties vulnerable and marginalized populations face accessing water.
- Support academic research via cross-border collaboration among the different scientific communities. Support the obligation to integrate this research into decision-making. Offer workshops and seminars related to cross-border problems and the amplification of policymaking. Create rewards and prizes to motivate young researchers.
- Ensure that proposals targeting multilateral, bilateral and other funding sources address water security using a cross-sectoral approach that includes climate change and migration. It is also urgent to look into building the capacities of Maghreb countries to design appropriate and convincing investment proposals that are adapted to climate change in the field of water, especially in rural areas.

While these recommendations are primarily directed at policymakers responsible for water security, policymakers and practitioners in the water sector as a whole will need to support these efforts with their experiences and expertise, and better coordinate their own plans and actions through continuous planning and implementation of climate-change measures.

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As of July 1st, 2021, and eleven years after its creation, the CMI has officially joined the United Nations (UN), hosted by the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

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