



Boiling dry: How the EU can help prevent instability in the water-scarce Maghreb

by Megan Ferrando, 20 April 2022

Over-exploitation and mismanagement of water, worsened by climate change, has made water scarcity of increasing concern in the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya). It constrains agricultural production and access to drinking water and weakens society's resilience to shocks. It's not just a matter for the region's governments: it's in the EU's climate, economic and security interests to improve water security in the Maghreb. In a new Centre for European Reform policy brief, '[Boiling dry: How the EU can help prevent instability in the water-scarce Maghreb](#)', Megan Ferrando, Clara Marina O'Donnell fellow (2021-22), argues that the issue should feature more prominently and in a more coherent way in the EU's neighbourhood policy.

In Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, water scarcity is interacting with economic, food and energy crises, increasing social discontent. Since the Arab uprisings of 2011, governments in the Maghreb have tended to focus on job creation as a means of keeping social unrest at bay; ensuring water security has not enjoyed the same level of priority. While the EU already invests in water and environmental protection in the region, it should step this up further by creating a dedicated water and climate strategy for the Maghreb. The EU should view such an approach as a conflict prevention strategy in itself. Given that water scarcity is linked to wider problems of marginalisation and government mismanagement, the author recommends that the EU make stronger links between water scarcity and broader social justice issues. And as climate change is already threatening natural resources and societies in the Maghreb, she recommends that the EU adopts a more balanced approach between climate change mitigation and adaptation, to strengthen the region and its populations' resilience to inevitable future climate shocks.

"Once a political and humanitarian crisis takes root, as in Libya, achieving sustainable development goals such as safe water gets even further out of reach," said Megan Ferrando. *"If the EU wants to avoid adding another crisis to its long list of priorities, it needs to take the challenge of the Maghreb's water security seriously."*

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Note for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with Megan Ferrando [@MegsFerrando](#) please contact Rosie Giorgi in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

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