

Water for Algiers

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A private-public partnership brings relief to a water-starved city.

The North African city of Algiers has long suffered from an acute shortage of drinking water.

But the strain on the city's infrastructure and water network has steadily increased over the past decade as growing numbers of citizens have relocated from the countryside to the capital.

The residents of Algiers on average only enjoy two or three hours of potable water each day.

The population of Algiers has now swollen to almost 4 million inhabitants, as a result.

To address the rising demand for water, the government has invested in new dams and reservoirs, but frequent droughts and the lack of natural surface and groundwater sources have conspired to ensure that water remains scarce in the country, which has no permanent rivers and where 95% of land is arid.

Efforts have also been made to upgrade the ageing water distribution network in the capital, cutting losses from 40% of the total water produced to 25% .

Nevertheless, the residents of Algiers on average still only enjoy two or three hours of potable water each day, and sometimes only receive water once every three days.

But that is all set to change with the startup of the new Hamma desalination plant.

The facility is one of a number of desalination units set to come onstream over the next couple of years as part of the Algerian government's drive to tap into the drought-proof supply of water offered by the Mediterranean Sea and the country's 1200 km coastline.