

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Arab Cities 2020

Financing Sustainable Urbanization
in the Arab Region



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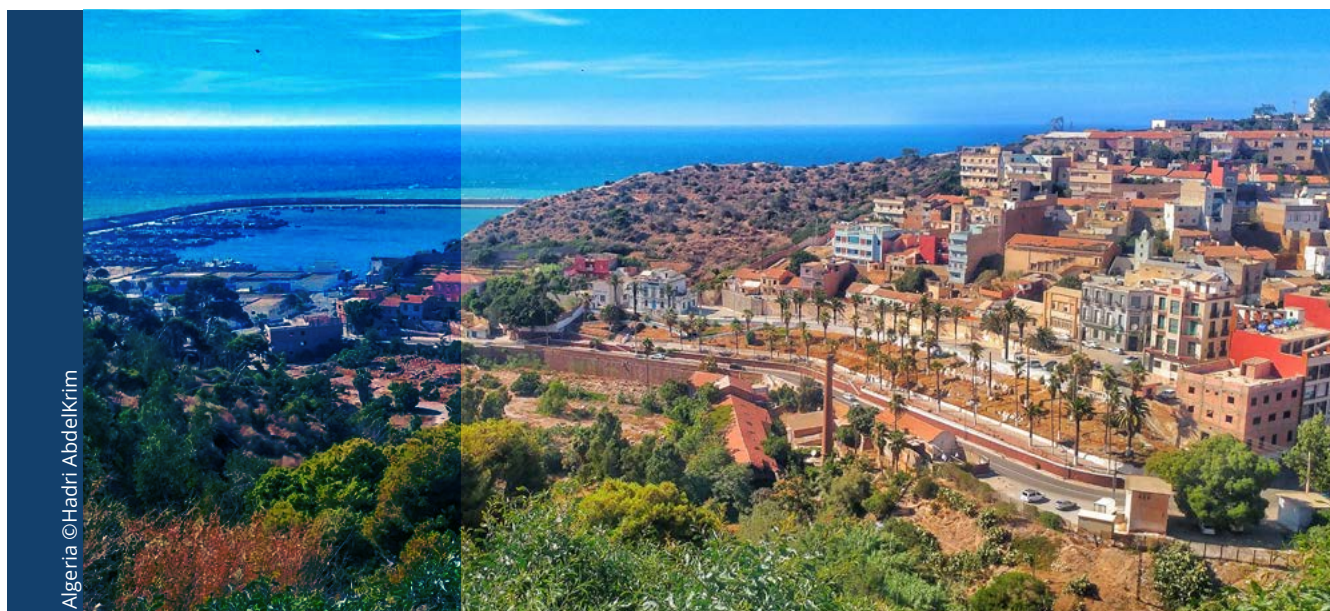
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Background

The previous and first State of Arab Cities Report in 2012 was a groundwork publication that mapped the broad facts and trends of urbanisation in the region, as well as the historic background to the Arab region's significant urban heritage. However, the world has changed even in the relatively short period since 2012, in some startling ways that are especially challenging to many countries contained in this report.

Since that last reckoning, the region has been buffeted by various conflicts and massive displacement, with an impact that has led this report to designate the economic and social status of some as *conflict or post-conflict states*. Moreover, since 2012, the real impact of climate change has swung from peripheral discussion to the centre of government policy-making, as the likelihood of real near-term impact increases. If the fifth Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) sea level predictions of 2014 transpire for example, within two decades the city of Alexandria, Egypt's principal port and a major industrial centre, faces the loss of a majority of its industrial area, its port infrastructure, and housing for most of its urban population, quite apart from its priceless antique heritage.

Further, since 2012, a global crisis of trust in government has swelled in a continuum of flawed policies, mounting inequalities, vulnerabilities and exclusion. In a region where around a third of the population is aged 15 to 25, and youth unemployment is 30 per cent, the quality of the bond of trust between government and an electorate that senses itself excluded from the fruits of development is critical.

The global demographic weight now leans ineluctably towards the city, the dominant organising principle of human coexistence. The management of the metropolis great and small is the *force majeure* of our time, a process that either inefficiently acts as a drag on human development, or which can be harnessed to create prosperity and to spread the benefits in pursuit of social tranquillity and individual wellbeing. It is in cities that

smart infrastructure underwritten by innovative financing mechanisms and integrated planning, combined with economies of scale, can produce the best results for fruitful coexistence.



Egypt ©Adel Beheiry

Why infrastructure?

In its second edition, *The State of Arab Cities* report 2020 is driven by a sense of urgency around the headlong expansion of urbanization, in a area where more than two-thirds of the population will reside in cities by the middle of this century. In 1950, just two cities of the region had a million people, whereas by 2025 this is expected to reach 31. At a time whereas many Arab countries are undergoing major infrastructure initiatives and the proliferation of new cities, it is particularly useful to examine the role played by urban infrastructure in shaping the region as a whole and influencing its urban future.

If Arab cities are to address the mounting needs of their inhabitants, the report seeks to demonstrate that innovative sub-national financial instruments and significant urban infrastructure investments must be harnessed to help forge inclusive, prosperous and resilient urban settlements. Well-managed urbanization can serve as the engine of sustainable development as the majority of people pursue happiness and fulfillment in cities and towns. Embracing a holistic approach to urban infrastructure planning and provision, tied to efficient institutions and adequate financial resources, will catalyze positive societal changes. Effective and sustainable infrastructure serves as lubricant between people and their built environment, now and into the future.

The State of Arab Cities report 2020 argues that infrastructure answers two immediate and long-term needs. Firstly, the smart reordering of decentralised municipal finances to build, maintain, and retrofit infrastructure is one of the most narrowly pragmatic and achievable interventions possible for governments and municipalities, with some highly effective small and large-scale examples from across the spectrum of the Arab region.

Secondly, the report suggests that in a region of 22 countries often beset by social tension, exclusion, poverty, and conflict, the planning and implementation of infrastructure augments peace-building, stabilization,

and legitimacy and inclusion, as citizens participate in shaping the environment of their cities. Infrastructure, as this report argues, can either be a vehicle for political and social exclusion that cements narrow conceptions of the city, or the engine for political and social inclusivity so vital for the region's women and young people, as well as groups like persons with disabilities, migrant workers, and minority religious and ethnic groups whose human capital and contribution are often wasted through marginalization.



Dubai, United Arab Emirates ©Hassan Ismail

Who should read this?

This report is primarily addressed to non-specialist and urban planning specialist administrators and decision-makers at the national, subnational and local levels. These professionals face the daily reality of making and implementing policies and choices that affect wellbeing outcomes for tens of millions of ordinary citizens living and working in urban areas in the Arab region. Nobody is better placed to understand the challenges of city administration than those with boots on the ground.

The tangible outcome of this report is a series of specific evidence-based urbanization policy recommendations that are feasible, implementable, cost-effective and transformative, and shaped to account for the multiple exigencies of the Arab region. Since the report is intended to provide pragmatic advice and insight, it has been a consultative process that has drawn from the expertise of national and local decision-makers in addition to administrative specialists and practitioners from the Arab region, as well as academics, finance experts, and development professionals.

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