In a context of demographic pressure and rapid urbanization, MENA cities are particularly sensitive to local and exogenous shocks. They are especially exposed to natural disaster and climate-related events, and the impact on cities has been aggravated by the rise in population density (62% of the total population of MENA live in cities and in absolute terms, the MENA urban population is expected to double by 2040), water scarcity and climate change. While the number of natural disasters around the world has almost doubled since the 1980s, in MENA it has almost tripled, affecting 40 million people over the last 25 years, with severe negative economic impact.

With greater integration into global markets and in the wake of the Arab Spring, MENA cities are also increasingly exposed to broader sets of other adverse shocks, which can also jeopardize hard-won gains and affect cities’ stability, their enterprises, households and individuals. While enabling democratic reforms and paving the way for economic development (the results of which will be achieved on a medium and long term), it is estimated that the Arab Spring has resulted in US$800 billion in lost output in the seven hardest-hit countries. The migration flows generated have also had a significant impact on the stability of several MENA cities.

Importantly, risk management is changing from a merely technical issue to a more strategic one in governments and businesses alike.

For instance, well-managed urban risks send a very strong signal of stability to the rest of the world, something foreign investors are extremely sensitive to.

There is also a growing recognition that urban risks cannot be managed in silo; any Mayor now needs to think more holistically about the risks that can affect future development and growth of his or her city.

To support MENA policymakers’ efforts to develop and implement comprehensive and integrated risk management strategies with key stakeholders in their community, the MENA UKP organizes this event; the third in the MENA UKP conference series\(^1\) and the second in a series of WB MENA resilience conferences\(^2\).

This invitation-only high level workshop will allow public and business leaders to help cities in MENA increase their resilience to a range of shocks through:

- Sharing the experiences and lessons learned from major cities and countries in the world that have similar risk exposure and have taken successful measures to enhance their resilience;
- Discuss openly some of the challenges and dilemma they face in making their city more resilient to shocks
- Enabling MENA leaders to interact with peers and world-renowned experts in the field to turn risk into opportunities for measurable progress in building resilience;
- Benefit from the World Bank and other partners’ knowledge
- Discussing ways to operationalize the recommendations of recent studies\(^3\) and to replicate this type of approach in other cities;
- Involving the private sector in the definition, the funding and the implementation of new solutions/technologies to address/reduce risks in cities.

The UKP will put together proceedings of this event and offer follow up opportunities for knowledge exchange and support to MENA clients, through its online platform.

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\(^1\) The MENA UKP was launched in September 2012 during a conference held in Marseille, kicking off a cycle of conferences. This was followed by a regional event organized in Rabat, Morocco, March 2013, delving into the municipal finance issue.

\(^2\) A regional consultative workshop to present the WB draft regional report “Natural Disasters in the Middle East and North Africa: A regional Overview” took place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, November 2013.

\(^3\) Including the action plans developed in 4 coastal cities with the support of the World Bank and the CMI.