

**Report on**  
***Cities and regions' potential role in Mediterranean civil protection***

This report was drawn up by André Viola (FR/PES), member of the Aude departmental council. It was revised after discussion at the ninth meeting of the Sustainable Territorial Development Committee of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) and adopted by consensus at the 14th ARLEM plenary session, held in Alghero, Italy, on 24 October 2023.

## Introduction

The Mediterranean region faces increasing threats from climate change, leading to more frequent natural disasters like floods, drought and water scarcity. Recent years have seen widespread fires causing substantial damage in countries like Algeria, Greece, Italy, and Türkiye.

In 2023, powerful earthquakes affected millions in Türkiye and Syria, including a significant refugee population. In September, Morocco also experienced a 6.8 magnitude earthquake that tragically claimed over 2 000 lives.

Given the transboundary nature of these crises, there is a pressing need for enhanced civil protection cooperation among Mediterranean cities and regions. The aim is to establish a sustainable regional civil protection mechanism in the Euro-Mediterranean region that not only enhances preparedness and response to future disasters but also fosters closer ties by bringing Europe closer to the territories and the people in the region.

## Context and objective

The Euro-Mediterranean civil protection efforts originated from the Barcelona Declaration. After an initial programme on Civil Protection cooperation (1998-2008), three consecutive Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters (PPRD) South projects (between 2009 and 2021) were implemented, each with a budget of 5 million Euros<sup>1</sup>. They aimed to boost cooperation among countries and enhance national civil protection agencies through tools, training, and awareness campaigns. The local and regional authorities (LRAs) of ARLEM differ widely in their civil protection approaches, influenced by resource disparities, with some emphasising preparedness and others crisis management.

In 2023, three Euro-Mediterranean civil protection initiatives have emerged, presenting significant opportunities for ARLEM to play a pivotal role:

1. PPRD Med programme for prevention, preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters in the Mediterranean<sup>2</sup>  
This new project, involving the International Science and Technology Centre, an international and intergovernmental organization, and the European Space Agency, harnesses advanced technology (satellite observation and artificial intelligence) with the aim of enhancing disaster preparedness in the partner countries.
2. Multi-country study –on the main risks and capacities to respond to risks<sup>3</sup>  
This initiative performs a comprehensive analysis of major risks and response capacities, informing future actions and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism's strategy.
3. OSA - On-site external technical assistance in IPA III beneficiary countries and countries in

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<sup>1</sup> PPRD I, II and III reports.

<sup>2</sup> The PPRD Med project is being implemented by the ISTC (<https://istc.int>) with the support of the ESA (<https://www.esa.int>) and is being funded by the European Commission's DG ECHO.

<sup>3</sup> Multi-country study - <https://www.pprdmed.eu/multicountrystudy>

the southern neighbourhood<sup>4</sup>

OSA improves the implementation of programmes and strengthens regional impact in beneficiary countries by offering support to national authorities.

Against this backdrop, ARLEM is committed to using its extensive network of Mediterranean LRAs to support and strengthen these new civil protection programmes. Leveraging its experience, ARLEM aims to play a pivotal role in improving disaster risk management in the Mediterranean region.

### **Leveraging LRA's capabilities**

1. *Local and regional authorities leading disaster resilience: lessons from France, Algeria, Lebanon, and Spain*

In **France**, LRAs actively engage in civil protection, particularly in risk and disaster management. Aude, a region in France, stands out for its dedicated efforts in risk reduction, including with regard to floods and forest fires. Initiatives like the *Syndicat Mixte des Milieux Aquatiques et des Rivières*<sup>5</sup> address flood risks and promote risk awareness among public agencies. Aude's success lies in clear plans, collaborative operations, and trust-based teamwork, offering valuable lessons for sustaining risk awareness despite staff turnover, and leveraging past disaster experiences. Aude serves as a model for interdisciplinary collaboration, emphasising inter-agency cooperation, trust-building, clear mandates, resource allocation, risk management, and expert continuity. The Aude region also pioneered France's first collaborative crisis management platform<sup>6</sup>.

In **Algeria**, LRAs, particularly cities, play a crucial role in civil protection, covering all disaster phases (risk, disaster and recovery management). Within these, they excel in disaster response, warning, and coordination, collaborating effectively with local entities and organisations like the Algerian Red Crescent. However, their role diminishes during the recovery phase, with a focus on socio-economic support and citizen risk awareness<sup>7</sup>.

In **Lebanon**, LRAs play a significant role in relation to seismic risks, and forest fires in the region:

- *Beirut*: Lebanon's capital is located in an active seismic zone, making it a region at high risk of earthquakes. Local authorities, in collaboration with national (e.g. the National Center for Geophysics - CNG) and international agencies, have implemented earthquake preparedness plans, conducted training for the population<sup>8</sup>, and carried out evacuation drills<sup>9</sup>.
- *Mount Lebanon*: This region is vulnerable to forest fires, especially during the summer. LRAs work closely with the National Council for Scientific Research in Lebanon (CNRS-L) on

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<sup>4</sup> OSA - <https://www.pprmed.eu/osa>

<sup>5</sup> SMMAR - <https://www.smmar.org/>

<sup>6</sup> A system for simultaneously feeding back information and coordinating responses from all stakeholders.

<sup>7</sup> Ergin, Boutaud de la Combe, Cpiarisse and Kovalchuk (2023), Study on *Cities and regions' potential role in Mediterranean civil protection*, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> LebQuake Mobile Application - An application for mobile phones has been developed, with the aim of informing citizens about seismic activity in Lebanon.

<sup>9</sup> <https://icibeyrout.com/liban/189573>

forest fire prevention, monitoring forested areas<sup>10</sup>, and coordinating with firefighters<sup>11</sup>.

In **Spain**, local and regional authorities are involved in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, for instance in:

- a) *Andalusia*: Local authorities work on fire prevention by clearing vegetation in vulnerable areas, and coordinate with regional firefighting teams; they have introduced new technologies for early detection using AI and sensors<sup>12</sup>.
- b) *Valencia*: Prone to coastal flooding and storms, local authorities have invested in infrastructure improvements (seawalls, drainage systems). They also engage in community-based disaster preparedness initiatives, including evacuation drills and education programmes.

These examples illustrate how local and regional authorities actively engage in civil protection to enhance the safety and resilience of their communities.

## 2. *Collaborative efforts on regional aerial firefighting and LRA involvement in disaster management*

In addition, **Cyprus** and **Jordan** are collaborating on the establishment of a regional aerial firefighting station. This strategic partnership underscores their dedication to efficiently combating wildfires and handling emergencies in the region<sup>13</sup>.

This can be done in conjunction with the NEMAUSUS pilot project (Network of European Multihazard capacities hub of Scientifics Understanding and Sharing), led by Nîmes Metropole, in cooperation with **France, Croatia, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Sweden** and **Cyprus**<sup>14</sup>. This hub project brings together civil security, research and aviation companies in a single location for increased responsiveness<sup>15</sup>. Nîmes Metropole now plays a crucial role in combating forest fires, from this base, from which Canadair and Dash planes and helicopters take off to combat fires in France; it also provides reinforcement throughout Europe where necessary and especially for the Mediterranean.

The success of this initiative greatly relies on the involvement of LRAs, which provide invaluable assistance in facilitating logistical support and ensuring seamless coordination with local emergency response efforts. Additionally, LRAs have a key role in engaging communities and promoting awareness regarding wildfire prevention and safety measures.

## 3. *Project implementation support*

LRAs have a role to play in supporting the three Euro-Mediterranean civil protection initiatives:

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10 <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/563d0603043640448882203a40d6d818>

11 <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1311871/risque-accru-de-feux-de-foret-ce-week-end.html>

12 <https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/07/20/these-electronic-noses-can-sniff-out-wildfires-and-alert-fire-authorities-using-ai>

13 <https://www.stockwatch.com.cy/en/article/genika/cooperation-between-cyprus-jordan-be-strengthened>

14 <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/projects/nemausus>

15 <https://www.lesechos.fr/pme-regions/occitanie/nimes-doit-accueillir-un-hub-europeen-de-la-securite-civile-1852007>

- a) **PPRD Med:** LRAs can contribute by providing local data and insights, facilitating community engagement in risk awareness programmes, and offering logistical support for the deployment of advanced technologies.
- b) **Multi-country study:** LRAs can assist by sharing regional data and expertise, participating in risk assessment exercises, helping identify gaps in risk management specific to their areas, and designing localised response strategies.
- c) **OSA:** LRAs can offer valuable local knowledge and act as intermediaries between the programme and beneficiary countries. LRAs can help identify challenges faced by national authorities and stakeholders, enabling more targeted and effective technical assistance.

Overall, LRAs can serve as key partners in implementing these initiatives, bridging the gap between regional or national efforts and the broader Euro-Mediterranean goals of enhancing resilience and cooperation in disaster management.

### **Enhancing disaster response and resilience at all governance levels**

Two key principles underline why LRAs must be involved in civil protection mechanisms<sup>16</sup>:

1. *Subsidiarity*, which means that decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level of governance, governs vertical relations, where the higher level supports the lower without supplanting it. This approach is particularly well suited to civil protection, since local and regional authorities are closest to the point of impact and to the people affected.
2. *Shared responsibility* implies that all stakeholders act to manage risk and respond to emergencies within the framework of their own activities and approval processes and cooperate with their peers where appropriate.

With these two principles in mind, specific recommendations are made for the following three levels of governance:

**Euro-Mediterranean level** | The Euro-Mediterranean region requires a disaster risk reduction mechanism inspired by the United Nations framework, and classifications for coastal local and regional authorities, similar to the models used in the EU's civil protection system, to foster collaboration effectively.

[Align these classifications with regional tools and solutions to develop a coordinated approach in the Euro-Mediterranean context.](#)

**National level** | The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that in serious emergencies, which, by their scale and scope, affect an entire region, a collective, coordinated and urgent response is needed to avoid a fragmented approach, which would limit its effectiveness. All civil protection mechanisms must be activated at several levels, so that the appropriate resources can be mobilised for the situation.

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<sup>16</sup> Ergin, Boutaud de la Combe, Cpiarisse and Kovalchuk (2023), Study on [Cities and regions' potential role in Mediterranean civil protection](#), p. 3.

The urgent requests to mobilise resources on a sufficient scale and to deploy them on the three coasts of the Mediterranean require close coordination at international, national and local level.

**Local and regional level** | Local and regional authorities are strengthening their resilience through a comprehensive disaster risk reduction (DRR) approach, including risk mapping, land-use adjustments, awareness campaigns, and disaster drills. By incorporating insights from local and regional authorities, this enhanced governance approach can also improve coverage of technological accidents triggered by natural hazards (known as "Natech" risks) by enriching the JRC's RAPID-N: Rapid Natech Risk Assessment Tool<sup>17</sup>.

LRAs enhance their disaster management capabilities with early warning systems, local response plans, and improved equipment.

## Proposals

We, local and regional authorities of the three shores of the Mediterranean, are committed to advancing our efforts in the face of escalating climate change impacts. To this end, we recognise the pivotal role that ARLEM can play as a platform for dialogue and interregional cooperation among local and regional authorities in our participating countries.

Mediterranean local and regional authorities are dedicated to addressing climate change impacts through ARLEM, emphasising risk reduction integration into EU and UfM policies.

ARLEM recommends that the EU prioritise investing in foresight to prepare societies for future challenges, involving local and regional authorities throughout the civil protection policy process, and aligning with active subsidiarity and multi-level governance<sup>18</sup>.

We also suggest strengthening the role of volunteers and the public through new projects similar to "ProVoice: Promoting the role of volunteers and the population in civil protection"<sup>19</sup>.

Finally, ARLEM encourages the active participation of women in civil protection, recognising that women bring diversity to the field, which can lead to new perspectives and innovative approaches<sup>20</sup>.

In conclusion, this report serves as **the foundation for enhanced civil protection cooperation** in the Mediterranean. It emphasises *subsidiarity* and *shared responsibility*, offering recommendations **at various levels of governance**. It promotes a coordinated regional approach, leveraging local and regional capabilities to build resilience at the community level, aiming to strengthen civil protection and enhance the resilience and prosperity of the Mediterranean community.

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<sup>17</sup> JRC (Joint Research Centre)'s RAPID-N: Rapid Natech Risk Assessment Tool: <https://rapidn.jrc.ec.europa.eu>

<sup>18</sup> The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) – 155th plenary session, 24 and 25 May 2023 – Opinion fact sheet: *Preparing for and dealing with crises: strengthening the resilience of the Union, its regions and cities* <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-5928-2022>

<sup>19</sup> [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/prevention-and-preparedness-projects-civil-protection/overview-past-track-i-and-track-ii-projects/promoting-role-volunteers-and-population-civil-protection-provoice\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/prevention-and-preparedness-projects-civil-protection/overview-past-track-i-and-track-ii-projects/promoting-role-volunteers-and-population-civil-protection-provoice_en)

<sup>20</sup> [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/female-and-front-line-women-civil-protection\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/female-and-front-line-women-civil-protection_en)