

CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

Resolution 129 (2002)¹ on local authorities confronting natural disasters and emergencies

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Local Authorities,

Background and definitions:

1. Concerned at the frequency of major disasters and emergencies with which local authorities are faced in Europe, causing widespread damage and loss to communities, business, commerce, habitats and housing, cultural heritage, transport and communications;
2. Wishing to identify the scope and impact of such disasters and emergencies and draw conclusions for policy proposals which may be of assistance, particularly for local authorities, in addressing the problem;
3. Making no distinction, for the purpose of such proposals, between natural or man-made disasters, in that the responses and responsibilities of local authorities are similar, irrespective of the source of disaster;
4. Wishing to focus, in terms of natural disasters, on floods, storms, earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, drought, forest fires and draw attention to the explanatory memorandum where the scope of such phenomena is described;
5. Wishing to focus, in terms of man-made disasters, on water and air pollution; industrial hazards and risks from transport and communication infrastructure and draw attention to the explanatory memorandum where the scope of such phenomena is described;

Some observations on the current situation:

6. Wishes to highlight a number of shortcomings in the response of official agencies and different levels of administration in anticipating and dealing with disasters, such as inadequate knowledge or acceptance of long-term climate changes; a confusion of responsibilities between different bodies involved; inadequate co-ordination and collaborative response; excessive diversity in sources of information for the public; inadequate contingency planning, prevention or risk analysis;
7. Aware that total protection can never be guaranteed but that more could be done, particularly in terms of co-ordination, by territorial authorities and specialised agencies in prevention and anticipation of disasters, information to the public, training and rehabilitation after disasters;

8. Equally aware that the public often unjustly criticises territorial authorities, as being somehow responsible for the damage caused: and does not always take sufficient steps to guard against risk;

9. Considers nevertheless that local authorities have a clear role in co-ordination of services and a key role themselves, before, during and after disasters;

10. Conscious, however, that national governments often invest local authorities with responsibility for dealing with disasters, without securing for them the necessary resources to do so; or the necessary structures for collective response;

11. Asks local authorities in member countries, in liaison with other levels of territorial administration and relevant specialised agencies, to:

Concerning prevention:

12. Ensure that they are fully aware of the risks and threats affecting their communities and undertake surveys and mapping of potential threats and comprehensive risk analyses, even though this may require significant funding;

Natural disasters and hazards

13. Concerning the risk of flooding, encourage the development of coherent management of watercourses and coastal areas, avoiding situations, for example, where construction of defences in one place cause flooding elsewhere; ensure that sewage and public, private and agricultural draining infrastructures are in good repair;

14. Discourage, and where necessary refuse, housing and industrial development in risk-prone areas; and include information about flood risks in property and notarial transactions;

15. Strengthen flood defence mechanisms, ensuring, for example, that they have at their disposal an adequate supply of sandbags; and persuade owners to take measures for contributing to their own defence;

16. Concerning storms, seek to secure the burying of electricity and telephone lines; have an adequate reserve of generators to provide for continued supplies of water and electricity; and ensure that intervention units are established in fire stations;

17. Wherever municipalities are dependent heavily on forestry as a basis for their economy, to consider diversification of their economic base; to replant damaged forests with diversified species; encourage planting at different heights, in accordance with local environmental conditions; consider reallocation of forest land in areas of multiple ownership in order to produce a more coherent and sustainable management; adopt a more flexible approach in the employment of forestry professionals from other countries in areas where skills are in short supply;

18. Ensure that buildings of architectural and cultural value are properly maintained, with regular inspections of the internal and external state of buildings;

19. Concerning earthquakes, discourage residents and industry from rebuilding on damaged sites; avail themselves of up-to-date earthquake forecasting when deciding upon the siting, design and architecture of housing and buildings; ensure that new constructions are as resistant as possible to earthquakes; ensure that disaster teams, with knowledge of neighbourhoods, are ready to go rapidly into action; that strategic siting is made of requisite emergency equipment; and that procedures and planning are fully explained to residents and the public;

20. Concerning landslides, that care be taken to map out areas of particular sensitivity and risk, for example, quarrying and mining areas, with, if necessary, programmes for infilling and restricted access and development;

21. Concerning avalanches, mark out risk areas and continue to discourage skiers and ramblers from “off-piste” activities;

22. Concerning drought, to discourage construction on land subject to subsidence in the event of drought; take steps to manage water use in a rational manner through, for example, differential approaches in treatment and pricing of water used for drinking and industrial purposes; repair leaking pipes and reservoirs;

23. Concerning forest fires, encourage plantation policies with adequate space for firebreaks; ensure that warning and risk signs are plentiful and visible; ensure that trees and scrub are cleared from housing and recreational areas;

Man-made disasters and hazards

24. Concerning water pollution, encourage farmers and landowners to limit the use of nitrates and pesticides; reduce the release and stockage in river basins of chemical and harmful substances arising from industrial, agricultural or domestic activities; define protected water resource perimeters; and limit building and industrial development alongside river banks;

25. Concerning air pollution, set up monitoring equipment for chemical substances such as ozone; take steps to limit pollution caused by motor vehicles; promote the use of ecologically-sound alternative energy resources, such as sea and wind turbines; ensure that adequate security exists against pollution by nuclear and industrial sites; that public utilities take steps to reduce the environmental impact of their activities; and that local Agenda 21 programmes are drawn up;

26. Concerning industrial hazards, take steps to survey industrial, commercial, infrastructure and public utility installations within their boundaries, with a view to the assessment of risk, in line with EU Seveso Directives;

27. Ensure that the siting of new installations is distant from residential areas and discourage the growth of residential areas in the neighbourhood of existing installations;

28. Ensure that particular attention is given to safety in schools and educational establishments;

29. Concerning transport and communications infrastructure, ensure that maintenance is regularly conducted, that major structures such as road and rail tunnels provide maximum standards of security for users, the least possible environmental impact and nuisance for local populations; that movements of toxic waste are more tightly controlled; that effective steps are taken to reduce the risk of pollution from tankers and other shipping in coastal and maritime regions;

30. Make satisfactory arrangements for contingency and emergency planning, in the event of disaster, with elaboration of plans and training in executing them; definition and simulation models; and harnessing and co-ordination of adequate resources and skills in the event of disaster;

Concerning information

31. Develop full and properly funded programmes of information about risks, both for other territorial authorities, specialised agencies and their population as whole; develop a public warning system, with preferably a single centre for information; promote programmes of education and awareness, in schools, housing areas and streets; seek the help of the media in this respect; and organise public hearings and debates in their municipalities;

During and after disasters and hazards

32. In the event of a disaster, ensure that full alert is given; assist in the site management of field operations; assist with victim support, including psychological support; assist with temporary rehousing, clothing, welfare and food; co-ordinate emergency services such as fire, police and other emergency services, including specialists from the armed forces;

33. After a disaster, take all necessary steps for the rehabilitation of affected areas and population; encourage and co-operate in effective and rapid independent investigations; ensure that the financial implications and responsibilities of insurers and relevant parties are respected and honoured; that lessons are learnt and new remedial steps taken, if indicated as advisable; and promote, if appropriate, disaster appeals to harness public financial support;

34. Encourage the establishment of an equitable and efficient system for compensation for victims of accidents;

35. Asks the Bureau of the CLRAE and particularly its Committee on Sustainable Development to:

36. Forward this resolution to national associations of local authorities and relevant specialist agencies in member countries;

37. Consider preparing a guide for local authorities and the public on best practice for dealing with natural disasters and emergencies, with material from a wide range of member countries;

38. Continue to co-operate with the organisation “Local Authorities Confronting Disasters and Emergencies” (LACDE) in further development of its work on the

subject, particularly in the context of the latter’s “Safer Cities Award”.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 21 March 2002 and adopted by the Standing Committee of the Congress on 22 March 2002 (See Doc. CPL (8) 6, draft resolution presented by Mrs Bordron and Mr Whittaker, rapporteurs).