

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 500 (2024)¹ Local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) refers to:

a. its Resolution 455 (2020) “Local and regional elections in major crisis situations”, which addresses some of the key challenges of upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law in times of crisis;

b. the explanatory memorandum on local and regional responses to natural disasters and climate hazards: from risk preparedness to resilience (CG(2024)46-17) which is based on three case studies in Belgium, Spain and Türkiye and study visits to the two latter countries that took place from 6 to 8 September 2023 and 18 to 20 December 2023 respectively;

c. Resolution 2493 (2023) and Recommendation 2251 (2023) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on political strategies to prevent, prepare for and face the consequences of natural disasters, providing guidance for co-ordination between different levels of governance, and underlining the importance of risk prevention and anticipation with regard to the most vulnerable populations;

d. Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on cultural heritage facing climate change: increasing resilience and promoting adaptation, which recommends that member States ensure the inclusion of cultural heritage in their policies and strategies for adaptation to climate change;

e. the Council of Europe Partial Agreement on the Co-operation Group for the Prevention of, Protection Against, and Organisation of Relief in Major Natural and Technological Disasters (EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement), which offers a platform for co-operation in the field of major natural and technological disasters;

f. the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) as an international roadmap for making communities safer and more resilient, by proposing

priority action in data collection, knowledge- building and co-operation at all levels;

g. the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular SDG 13: “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts” SDG 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities, three goals which may be relevant for disasters and hazards of all kinds.

2. The Congress considers that:

a. even though many local and regional authorities are well prepared for acute crisis situations, the capacities for responding to extreme or multilayered disasters and hazards could be increased by strengthening solidarity between different levels of governance within a State, by professionalising the management of crises, and by assigning the human and financial means needed to the devolved missions of each level of authority;

b. co-ordination between different levels of governance and co-operation between different stakeholders within a territory are essential and require constant improvement, notably in the areas of crisis preparedness, communication and professional training;

c. gaps in transparency and consistency of decision-making processes may represent threats or undermine human rights, democracy and the rule of law in times of crisis;

d. measures employed in response to natural disasters and climate hazards sometimes remain too short-sighted to prevent, mitigate or respond to these events in the most effective and sustainable manner;

e. responses provided to natural disasters and climate hazards should not worsen socio-economic imbalances or the precarious situations of vulnerable persons;

f. communication with and the involvement of the population affected remain a huge challenge in the face of extreme natural disasters and continuous climate hazards;

g. the identification of different risks and response plans to crises are ambitious activities that require regular updates at predetermined intervals.

3. The Congress calls on local and regional authorities in member States to:

a. follow a comprehensive approach in identifying potential risks and addressing any crisis situation expected or encountered, including for natural disasters and climate hazards;

b. foresee a mix of material, administrative and other measures in response to these risks and actual crisis situations, with priorities to be decided on a case-by-case basis and according to the types of risks faced by their specific territory;

c. ensure that effective vertical co-ordination mechanisms involving different administrative levels (State, region,

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 46th Session on 28 March 2024 (see document CG(2024)46-17, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Jean-Paul BASTIN, Belgium (L, EPP/CCE), and Christian DEBEVE, France (R, ILDG).

municipality) are set up to provide effective multilevel responses to emergencies and develop shared tools for the prevention and anticipation of crisis situations (data collection, exchange of good practice, development of expertise and training);

d. set up horizontal co-operation mechanisms that are based on a clear division of responsibilities and regularly reviewed, and that involve relevant stakeholders in a meaningful manner (public authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private companies, academia, citizens, etc.), foreseeing specific co-operation levels and bodies if crisis situations require co-ordinated responses in multiple areas and exceed the limits of one territorial unit;

e. communicate about expected or ongoing crisis situations in the most transparent, precise and reliable manner possible, making use of various types of media, to raise awareness and increase risk- preparedness amongst the wider public, without fuelling fear or anxiety;

f. improve the crisis preparedness and response of local and regional services, including professionals and volunteers involved in emergency response, in particular by developing specific emergency plans for each type of risk, by providing training on expected risks and measures to be taken and by running emergency simulation exercises on a regular basis;

g. design consistent, multidisciplinary and transparent decision-making procedures around crisis situations in order to put in place safeguards against violations of human rights,

democratic principles and the rule of law and to follow democratic standards and best practices by ensuring the regular involvement of citizens and fostering youth participation;

h. combine and co-ordinate effective short-term action with more long-term visions, strategies and measures, to ensure that any investments made in reconstruction or recovery are efficient and sustainable;

i. organise exchanges of experiences and good practice at all levels and involving all stakeholders (public authorities, NGOs, private companies, academia, citizens, etc.), in order to help people develop a better understanding of their territory, to constantly improve crisis preparedness and response, to seek innovative solutions and to initiate the socio-economic, urban and ecological transitions needed (“laboratories of transition”);

j. initiate a dialogue on current modes of human land use and consumption patterns and their consequences for natural resources and climate change, as well as disasters and hazards amplified by human factors, in order to develop risk cultures and strengthen the resilience of local and regional territories.

4. The Congress commits to supporting the implementation of this Resolution and the development of comprehensive responses to natural disasters and climate hazards by encouraging the consideration of the full crisis management cycle and the combination of short-term action and long-term strategies.