



**European Committee
of the Regions**



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL AND LOCAL ASSEMBLY

ACTION PLAN 2020-2022

Adopted at the 11th ARLEM Plenary session on 23 January 2020 in Barcelona, Spain and updated at the 12th ARLEM Plenary session on 22 February 2021 (via videoconference)

Climate change and new digital technologies are rapidly changing societies and peoples' lives. In addition, regions and cities on the three shores of the Mediterranean have to face the challenges linked to local economic development, demographic disparities, increasing urbanisation, integration of migrants and more that have been increased by the COVID-19 pandemic

Europe must lead the transition to a healthy planet and a new digital world, stated the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her Agenda for Europe by 2024. For her, European leadership also means working hand in hand with neighbours and partners and the EU is to spend 30% more on external-action investment in the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027 in order to remain a strong global actor.

In the context of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the active commitment, the concrete contributions and the solidarity of regions and cities are needed to end poverty, protect the planet from degradation, lay the base for prosperity and foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies. In this sense, it is of paramount importance to localise the Sustainable Development Goals through policies tailored to local needs and improved ownership by local and regional actors. This should include more coordination in order to promote local contributions and with a view to strengthening the visibility of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) at United Nations level. The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) could already show clear results in this regard.

Regional cooperation in the southern neighbourhood has seen progress through the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which has proved to be a valuable forum for political and economic discussion, providing a framework for cooperation on issues of common interest and on operational projects in the region.

The objective of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) is to strengthen the role of local authorities in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and to give a territorial dimension to the Union for the Mediterranean. This requires a multi-level approach including the national, regional and local levels, as well as regional, sub-regional and cross-border cooperation. More support must therefore be provided for decentralisation reforms in the neighbourhood countries.

ARLEM will continue to provide political support to the Nicosia Initiative for cooperation with Libyan municipalities as a concrete example of mutually beneficial peer-to-peer partnerships in the Euro-Mediterranean context. In this respect, the financial support from the European Commission and the EU delegation to Libya for 2020 onwards should facilitate embedding Nicosia Initiative activities in a longer-term strategic approach. ARLEM will involve representatives from Libyan local authorities as observers in its statutory meetings and events.

1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

During its 2020-2022 term of office, ARLEM will concentrate its work on the following three fields, so as to focus the assembly's work where it can bring the greatest benefit to local and regional authorities on the three shores of the Mediterranean, as well as to make efficient use of the resources of the ARLEM secretariat. The COVID-19 pandemic has only underlined the relevance of the following three fields of action, each of which needs to be enhanced to reflect the needs of the respective communities, including in terms of economic recovery.

1.1 Sustainable economic development

Regional and local authorities are actively involved in economic development and investment, tackling a wide range of issues, such as the management of the water and energy supply, waste management, environmental protection, transport, education, culture etc. Through intensive dialogue and exchanging experiences, ARLEM could contribute to the process of identifying concrete means of activating the potential of local and regional authorities in the Mediterranean countries to support local economic growth, investment opportunities and sectoral cooperation. ARLEM could organise seminars and provide information on different EU funding instruments and opportunities.

After two successful editions of the "ARLEM award: Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean", in this term of office ARLEM will continue to grant an award to a young entrepreneur at local level and to the supporting local/regional authority from the Mediterranean partner countries, focusing on the link between them. The objectives of the award are threefold: to showcase a successful example of youth entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region as an inspiration to others; to use this example to demonstrate the positive impact that local and regional authorities in Mediterranean partner countries can have on the entrepreneurial ecosystem; to make evident how young entrepreneurs in Mediterranean partner countries actively take the future into their own hands and create jobs and local economic development.

Following up on its report on *youth entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*, ARLEM will continue cooperation with the European Commission and the UfM in this field.

The digital revolution has transformed society with unprecedented speed and scale. The rapid spread of digital technologies is transforming many economic and social activities. The expansion of the digital economy creates many new economic opportunities, but positive outcomes are far from being automatic.

It is crucial for SMEs to invest in digitalisation in order to stay on the market and foster their growth. At the same time, it is difficult for them to compete in the global e-commerce arena due to the high costs and the lack of expertise. SMEs need support, particularly when it comes to basic IT skills, website management and logistics. In a report by Lizzy Delaricha (mayor of Ganei Tikva, IL), ARLEM is exploring the strategies for local and regional authorities to support the digital economy and particularly the digitalisation of small businesses. The recommendations in this report could be a contribution to the UfM Ministerial Conference on the Digital Transformation.

For the economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be essential to look into the potential of transferrable skills e.g. in the tourism sector and to boost innovation.

Finally, migration will remain an important issue in the Mediterranean area where the three categories of origin, transit and destination countries overlap in a unique way. Cities and regions are at the forefront of efforts to tackle migration-related phenomena, and the integration of migrants must be addressed within the communities to ensure that people live together on a sustainable and equitable basis. ARLEM reiterates the need to support cities, regions and communities receiving and assisting refugees and/or migrants and to provide them with adequate basic services and direct access to funds.

1.2 Climate action in the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean region has been identified as one of the main climate change hotspots in the world due to water scarcity, desertification, concentration of economic activities and population in coastal areas, and the reliance on climate-sensitive agriculture.

A scientific report on climate and environmental change by the MedECC network¹ shows that the Mediterranean region warms 20% faster than the rest of the world and 250 million people are projected to be considered "water poor" within 20 years. With current policies, temperatures are expected to increase 2.2 °C by 2040, well above the global limit established by the Paris Agreement.

This topic links with one of the overarching political priorities of the new European Commission, the "European Green Deal". The new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wants the European Green Deal to become Europe's hallmark and Europe to be the front-runner exporting knowledge, technologies and best practices.

The case of agriculture and food security in climate-vulnerable areas is a particularly important issue. ARLEM is focussing one of the thematic reports for adoption in 2021 on this topic and thus feeds into the 2nd UfM Ministerial meeting on Environment and Climate Change, to be organised in 2021.

¹ "Risks associated to climate and environmental changes in the Mediterranean region", https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MedECC-Booklet_EN_WEB.pdf

Following the adoption of its report on the *Blue economy for local authorities in the Mediterranean* (rapporteur Vincenzo Bianco, IT/PES), ARLEM will continue to work for a smart and resilient blue economy in terms of the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health. In its activities, ARLEM will look for synergies with the CoR's work in this field and especially in relation to the follow up on the opinion on the Initiative for the Sustainable Development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean, by rapporteur Samuel Samuel Azzopardi, MT/EPP.

ARLEM will also continue and further develop the very fruitful cooperation with the UfM Secretariat and its efforts to support and facilitate the regional dialogue on the blue economy, in the context of the second UfM Ministerial meeting to which ARLEM is contributing in February 2021.

1.3 Women's empowerment

ARLEM strives to promote women's empowerment and gender equality, in terms of rights and opportunities, as an essential asset to foster regional stability and socio-economic development. The obstacles to women's active participation in politics should be addressed and any legal barriers to women's political participation in election processes should be eliminated in order to encourage more stable, prosperous and inclusive societies.

Gender quotas are one policy tool designed to increase women's representation in politics. One way to implement gender quotas is by reserving a certain number of leadership positions for women. In this respect, gender quotas for women in local government bodies can improve women's representation in politics, increase provision of public services, and improve perceptions of women as leaders.

Depending on budget availability, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) should commission a study for ARLEM on the participation of women in political life in the EU Member States and the Mediterranean partner countries, including existing experience with gender quotas. The results can be presented at regional fora like the Women4Med Conference organised by the UfM Secretariat, one of the major regional platforms for exchanging experiences on gender equality.

ARLEM might also seek to work together with associations active in the field to promote and develop cooperation between women from the Southern Mediterranean and European women.

ARLEM will participate in the work of the UfM and partner organisations, as a follow-up to the ARLEM report on *Women's empowerment in the Mediterranean*. The promotion of interpersonal contact between women from the different sides of the Mediterranean should be enhanced with the necessary financial resources and specific projects.

2. THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

2.1 A forum for ongoing political dialogue

ARLEM provides a platform for political dialogue with the European and international institutions: the European Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS), Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), European Parliament, etc.

2.2 Contribution to consultative work through thematic reports

In 2020-2022, ARLEM, at the initiative of its members, may prepare thematic reports linked to some of its strategic priorities.

2.3 Representation of the local and regional level at UfM summits

ARLEM brings the voice of local and regional authorities to the table at UfM summits. More specifically, upon invitation, it may participate as an observer in, and contribute to, scheduled ministerial meetings and ad hoc senior official meetings (SOMs) (in addition to the regular SOMs) (see point 5).

3. **THE ROLE OF PARTNERS FOR ARLEM**

In pursuing its objectives, ARLEM will work together not only with the European associations² representing LRAs who, as ARLEM members, play an active role in its activities and projects, but also with a number of other partners, seeking to participate in the major transnational events and initiatives they are planning for 2020-2022.

The excellent cooperation with the UfM³ will allow ARLEM to bring the territorial aspect to the different policies of the UfM in 2020-2022. Moreover, ARLEM shall further engage as a UfM permanent observer and explore bolder engagement with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (PA-UfM).

ARLEM will pursue its cooperation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe during the current mandate and extend its cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee in fields where synergies between LRAs and civil society organisations bring most benefits. Both partners hold observer status within ARLEM.

Through its ARLEM Award: Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean, ARLEM actively cooperates with the members of the evaluation committee composed of representatives from the UfM Secretariat, the European Training Foundation, the European Commission – DG NEAR, the Joint Research Centre JCR, CPMR and MedCities, Eurochambres, Womenpreneur and Anima Invest.

ARLEM is open to continuing its collaboration with the European Training Foundation (ETF)⁴ and the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA).

² The Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Arco Latino, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR), the Standing Committee for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM), MedCities, and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

³ Declaration of Intent between ARLEM and the UfM Secretariat signed in 2013.

⁴ Declaration of Intent between ARLEM and the ETF signed in 2013.

4. **THE OPERATIONAL DIMENSION**

- Every year, not more than two thematic reports will be drawn up (with input from a 20-page CoR study), with an equal number of rapporteurs from the EU and from the Mediterranean partners' groups.
- In line with the Declaration of Understanding signed with the secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2013, ARLEM will continue to actively participate in the UfM's activities.
- A topic can be addressed at meetings, which range from debates at statutory ARLEM meetings to specific seminars, workshops, conferences or study visits that the Assembly can organise, or within the context of the European Week of Regions and Cities. ARLEM members will contribute to the next edition of the Forum on "*Cities and Regions for Development Cooperation – Local and regional partnerships for sustainable urban development*", which could be co-organised in Brussels by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions in 2021.
- Statutory meetings provide an opportunity for members involved in particular fields to report back to the Assembly or its Bureau.
- Specific topics might best be addressed by studies, pending CoR budgetary availability. For each of the two thematic ARLEM reports every year, the CoR intends to provide thematic support to the rapporteur by commissioning a 20-page study. ARLEM can also offer its members access to information by supporting and developing different online tools such as the information on the division of powers between several levels of government in the EU and Mediterranean partner countries on the CoR's website⁵. Cooperation with other partners is sought in all activities and the Assembly is open to proposals from its partners.

5. **TIMETABLE OF ARLEM RELATED ACTIVITIES AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTION 2020-2022**

This timetable is a living document. It lists regular events and proposals by ARLEM members, partners and stakeholders, as approved by ARLEM co-chairs. Additional suggestions and proposals by ARLEM members, partners and stakeholders are welcome and will be incorporated based on the approval of ARLEM co-chairs. The timetable will be updated during the course of the reference period.

The ARLEM plenary session in general meets once a year. The ARLEM Bureau meets at least once a year, on the occasion of the plenary session; additional meetings may be held in the period between two plenary sessions. ARLEM's commission for sustainable territorial development meets once a year. The meetings could be held in Brussels or (upon invitation) in the partner or EU countries.

⁵ <http://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/default.aspx>

2020

22-23 January, Barcelona, Spain

- 11th ARLEM plenary session, preceded by coordination meetings and 25th ARLEM Bureau meeting
- Adoption of the draft ARLEM reports on *Blue Economy for local and regional authorities in the Mediterranean Region* and on *Euro-Mediterranean integration: The role of regional and local authorities*
- Adoption of the 2020-2022 Action plan
- Adoption of political recommendations for 2020
- ARLEM Award 2020 - Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean - ceremony

October

- ARLEM workshop linked to employment/entrepreneurship at the European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels
- Presentation of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 to ARLEM and CoR members and discussion
- 6th meeting of the ARLEM Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development (per videoconference)

November

- UfM Regional Forum, Barcelona

Throughout the year

- Follow-up to the Nicosia Initiative
- UfM SOMs/ ad hoc SOMs: Follow-up and participation of ARLEM secretariat as appropriate

2021

February

- 12th ARLEM plenary session, preceded by ARLEM Bureau meeting (per videoconference)
- Adoption of the draft ARLEM reports
- Adoption of political recommendations for 2021
- ARLEM Award 21- Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean - ceremony

May-July (tbc)

- Bureau meeting (tbc)

October

- 7th meeting of ARLEM Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development
- ARLEM members participating in the European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels – workshop launching a new CoR publication on EU funding available for LRAs in Mediterranean partner countries (tbc)

November

- UfM regional forum (tbc)
- 28/11: Celebration of the Day of the Mediterranean (launched at the launched at the 5th UfM Regional Forum in 2020 at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration)
- 29-30/11: Forum on "Cities and Regions for Development Cooperation – Local and regional partnerships for sustainable urban development", co-organised by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions, Brussels

Throughout the year

- Follow-up on the Nicosia initiative
- UfM SOMs/ ad hoc SOMs: follow-up and participation of ARLEM secretariat as appropriate

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N.B. Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX

ARLEM Reports and Position Papers 2010-2021

(in brackets: year of adoption)

Report Title	Rapporteur
Policy field: Energy, environment and climate change	
Local water management in the Mediterranean (2011)	Ramon Luis Valcarel Siso (Murcia/ES) (SUDEV) ⁶
The promotion of renewable energies: a factor for economic and social co-development in the Mediterranean region (2012)	Michel Lebrun (Wallonia/BE) (SUDEV)
The link between desertification and climate change in the Mediterranean (2012)	Nichi Vendola (Puglia/IT) (SUDEV)
Waste management at local and regional level in the Mediterranean region (2014)	Mohammed Boudra (Taza-Al Hoceima-Taounate/MA) (SUDEV)
Energy and climate change (2017)	Mohamed Sadiki (Rabat/MA)
Blue economy for local and regional authorities (2020)	Vincenzo Bianco (Catania/IT)
Agriculture and food security in the context of climate change in the Mediterranean (2021 tbc)	Agnès Rampal (Nice/FR)
Policy field: Mobility, migration and integration	
Position paper on the role of women (2013)	
The role of local and regional authorities in managing migration in the Mediterranean (2014)	António Costa (Lisbon/PT) (ECOTER)
List of good practices on integration (2015)	
Employment and territorial development in the Mediterranean (2016)	Eleni Loucaidou (Nicosia/CY)
Women's empowerment in the Mediterranean region (2018)	Mary Freehill (Dublin/PES)
The role of the sub-national authorities from the Mediterranean region in addressing radicalisation and violent extremism of young people (2018)	Mohamed Kamal El Daly (Giza/EG)
Policy field: Urban and socio-economic development, cultural issues	
Urban development in the Mediterranean (2011)	Khalid Al Hnaifat (Greater Tafilah/JO) (ECOTER)
The role of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Mediterranean (2012)	Fathallah Oualalou (Rabat/MA) (ECOTER)
The preservation and enhancement of cultural heritage in the Mediterranean (2012)	Asim Güzelbey (Gaziantep/TR) (ECOTER)
Sustainable tourism in the Mediterranean (2013)	Michèle Sabban (Assembly of European Regions) (SUDEV)
Technical Education and Vocational Training in the	Peter Bossman (Piran/SI) (ECOTER)

⁶ The former ARLEM commissions for sustainable development (SUDEV) and Economic, Social and Territorial Affairs (ECOTER) were merged as of 2015.

Mediterranean (2013)	
Sustainable urban mobility in the Mediterranean (2014)	Karim Bennour (Algiers/DZ) (SUDEV)
A sustainable urban agenda in the Mediterranean (2016)	Fawzi Masad (Amman/JO)
Digitalisation of SMEs in the Mediterranean region (2021 tbc)	Lizzy Delaricha (Ganei Tikva/IL)
Policy field: External affairs and cooperation	
A cohesion policy for the Mediterranean region (2014)	Joana Ortega i Alemany (CRPM, Catalonia/ES) (ECOTER)
Position paper on the ENP (2015)	
Cross border cooperation (2017)	Francesco Pigliaru (Sardinia/IT)
Euro-Mediterranean integration: The role of regional and local authorities (2020)	Jihad Khair (Beit Sahour, Palestine)