



**European Committee
of the Regions**



Version of 07/02/2022, 18:45

EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL AND LOCAL ASSEMBLY

Recommendations for 2022

Adopted at the 8th meeting of the ARLEM Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development, held in Marseille, France, in hybrid mode on 7 February 2022.

Twenty-six years after the Barcelona Declaration set the goal of creating an area of peace and shared prosperity around the Mediterranean, many objectives have not yet been reached and there are still numerous challenges. The Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) is pursuing its commitment to providing a mouthpiece and platform for local and regional authorities to promote the "territorialisation" of Euro-Mediterranean sectoral policies and promote cooperation at territorial level.

Eleven years on from the Mediterranean Spring that occurred in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, the popular uprisings have led to disparate outcomes in terms of the democratic reforms that people took to the streets to demand, in some cases leading to armed conflict.

The climate crisis affecting the entire planet is having a severe impact on the Mediterranean area, the second most affected area of the world by climate change after Antarctica. As highlighted by the International Panel of Experts on Climate Change, climate change in the Mediterranean will be one of the most radical in the world. Changes are reflected in all types of phenomena: heat waves and severe cold spells, floods, extreme rainfall, droughts, fire risk, a drop in average wind speed, an increase in Mediterranean cyclones, coastal phenomena, etc. The region is facing serious threats, in particular water stress, a deterioration in food production, food insecurity, desertification and severe pollution.

These threats have been exacerbated in recent decades by demographic growth (over 500 million inhabitants, twice as many as 40 years ago), migration to urban areas, and tourism. All these elements combined have a serious impact on the economic, political and social fabric of Mediterranean societies.

The pandemic crisis has been a catalyst for the changes already taking place, in particular exacerbating social rifts, imbalances and tensions. This is triggering huge migration flows, a veritable outflow of human beings, especially young people, driven by the hope of a better life and, above all, a future.

At the same time, growing urbanisation presents challenges for the planning, urban planning, materials and financing thereof needed to make the cities of the future more sustainable. Current urbanisation projections suggest that cities in the countries of the South could receive 96 % of the total increase in urban population by 2050.

The sluggish development of the economy prior to the COVID-19 pandemic has, since the outbreak of the latter, been turning into a recession. Although the entire economy has been suffering from the lockdowns, the crucial tourism sector has been particularly badly affected. Vulnerable groups have been the hardest hit by the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and poverty rates have gone up.

Faced with this complex situation, close cooperation between the various countries is essential, as no one country can cope with the threats alone. It is an international and collective responsibility.

This warrants, all the more, cooperation within ARLEM to strengthen cooperation between local and regional authorities on the three shores of the Mediterranean.

In early 2022, local and regional representatives meeting in ARLEM took stock of a year marked by the elements listed above. Nevertheless, they are all – together – looking ahead to steer the way to developing resilience and building back better, in a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, guided by the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach also underpins the common objectives set out in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the renewed partnership with the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, a fundamental framework for ARLEM.

2022 should also be the starting point for the implementation of this new Agenda for the Mediterranean and the "Multiannual Financial Framework", the new long-term budgetary programming period of the EU, which runs until 2027 and is characterised by a significantly revamped funding structure, whereby the geographical approach in the new "Global Europe" instrument (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) has been strengthened.

Recent developments, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic, have only underlined the full relevance of the three fields of action identified in ARLEM's 2020-2022 action plan: sustainable economic development, climate action and women's empowerment.

Representing the territorial dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), ARLEM can support cooperation between the EU and its southern neighbouring partners on a local and regional level.

ARLEM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2022

Sustainable economic development

1. Economic development must be accompanied by inclusive and sustainable social development to promote the resilience of the population and overall stability. To this end, public authorities, including those at local and regional level, should be both strengthened and monitored in their delivery of basic public services.

2. ARLEM welcomes the economic and investment plan under the new EU Agenda for the Mediterranean, which aims to boost long-term socio-economic recovery in the southern neighbourhood.
3. It hopes that the report on *Service sector re-orientation: transferring skills from the tourism sector* (rapporteur: Mohamed Boudra, President of the Moroccan Association of Mayors), which it will be adopting at its November plenary session, will enable concrete solutions to be found for the much-needed modernisation of the sector and for the mobility of workers who have been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 crisis.
4. ARLEM calls for the European Commission to focus on entrepreneurship, especially among young people, and particularly women, as well as on investment for the sustainable development of the economy in its southern neighbourhood. It calls on the European Commission to take targeted initiatives in these areas and to promote exchanges of experience among young people on entrepreneurship.
5. ARLEM helps promote youth entrepreneurship with its "Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean" award – now in its fourth year – youth entrepreneurship being a vector for economic development in the Mediterranean region; the assembly helps showcase successful examples of young entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean region as an inspiration to others. This initiative furthermore aims to demonstrate the positive impact that local and regional authorities in Mediterranean partner countries can have on the entrepreneurial ecosystem and to highlight how young entrepreneurs in Mediterranean partner countries actively take their future into their own hands and create jobs for local economic development.
6. The UfM could envisage creating an entrepreneurial community of the Mediterranean among the winning and shortlisted candidates, stemming from different sectors and operating at different levels of innovation.
7. The ARLEM report on *Innovation ecosystems and start-ups in the Mediterranean as drivers of socio-economic recovery, digital transformation and sustainable development following the COVID-19 crisis* (rapporteur: Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla, President of the Andalusia Junta, representing the Association of European Border Regions), to be adopted at the next plenary session, will provide an analysis of the different entrepreneurship systems in the Mediterranean and an examination of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these systems, with the aim of identifying both a) the main difficulties and opportunities arising during the economic crisis the pandemic has caused and b) good practice and successful experiences in the Mediterranean region and those in other geographical areas that may be exported to the Mediterranean, as well as making a number of recommendations.

2022: European Year of Youth

8. The European Year of Youth in 2022 will aim to develop better prospects for the future for young people who have been hard hit by the consequences of the pandemic crisis. This will encourage young people to become active citizens and agents of change. ARLEM supports

these objectives and calls for exchanges between young people in the European Union and those in the southern region to be stepped up and promoted. It recommends that its members build on all existing arrangements to encourage such exchanges.

9. It also recommends extending the YEP (Young Elected Politicians) network set up by the European Committee of the Regions to include young elected politicians (under the age of 40) from the southern shores of the Mediterranean in order to promote exchanges of experience and know-how on local governance and to enable them to participate in targeted training courses on European issues.
10. ARLEM supports and encourages citizens' initiatives promoting active citizenship amongst young people, such as the Mediterranean Youth Council, which brings together young people from countries all round the Mediterranean. It recommends regular exchanges with this type of body to better incorporate young people's aspirations into policies developed at local and cross-border level or as part of cooperation between Mediterranean local and regional authorities.

Climate action in the Mediterranean

11. ARLEM calls for local and regional authorities to be fully involved in the implementation of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean on matters pertaining to the green transition (climate resilience, energy and the environment), since the potential offered by a low-carbon future needs to be harnessed, the region's natural resources protected and green growth generated.
12. The 27th UN Climate Change Conference (COP 27), to be held from 7 to 18 November 2022 in the seaside city of Sharm el Sheikh (Egypt), constitutes an important opportunity for local and regional authorities in the Mediterranean to step up their efforts, taking into account the UfM ministerial declarations adopted in 2021 on the environment and climate change, on energy and on the blue economy, with a view to strengthening the role of local and regional authorities in global governance to improve implementation of the UN SDGs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and raise climate ambitions.
13. COP27 is an opportunity for local and regional authorities to change the language adopted under the Glasgow Climate Pact: the set of decisions includes a series of points of agreement, including on strengthening efforts to boost resilience in the face of climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide the necessary funding for both of these objectives. Countries reaffirmed it was the duty of developed countries to deliver the promised USD 100 billion to developing countries. The pact stresses "the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action", opening the door to greater involvement of local and regional authorities in international climate negotiations.
14. It is very important to advance the adaptation programme by looking at nature-based solutions. Land degradation is another hot topic in the run-up to COP27, and the transformation of food systems is crucial for addressing the challenges posed by climate change, as well as for preserving biodiversity and avoiding serious repercussions on food

security. Mediterranean landscapes have great potential for halting and reversing nature loss, reducing global emissions and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

15. Following the adoption of its report on the *Blue economy for local authorities in the Mediterranean* (rapporteur Vincenzo Bianco, member of Catania City Council and President of the National Council of ANCI, Italy/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 to the opinion on the *Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the western Mediterranean* (rapporteur: Samuel Azzopardi, MT/EPP).
16. ARLEM will also contribute by pursuing and developing its highly fruitful cooperation with the UfM Secretariat, as well as its efforts to support and facilitate regional dialogue on the blue economy.
17. It calls for the involvement of LRAs in implementing the Euro-Mediterranean water agenda, which may provide a framework for the management of water resources and should make it possible to make progress on protection of the environment in this region that has been so badly affected by the damaging effects of climate change.
18. ARLEM encourages cities and regions in the Mediterranean basin to be involved in climate action and existing climate cooperation, including the Covenant of Mayors, which it strongly supports.

Women's empowerment

19. ARLEM is committed to promoting women's empowerment, as well as equal rights and opportunities for women and men, as key tools to foster justice, social cohesion, regional stability and socio-economic development. In order to encourage the emergence of fairer, more democratic, more stable, prosperous and inclusive societies, the obstacles to women's active participation in society in general and in economic, intellectual and political life should be addressed, and any legal or other barriers to women's involvement in community life and to their participation in all areas of society and politics, in election processes and in representation following elections, including in leadership positions, should be removed.
20. ARLEM calls for the legislative framework to ensure that women fully benefit from their civil rights and liberties, as well as equal opportunities in employment, and to close the gender gap in employment and pay. It also calls for this legislative framework to put an end to sexual and domestic violence and encourages its members to take initiatives in this domain (information campaigns, establishment of dedicated telephone numbers, training of public service officers, school awareness campaigns, educational programmes, etc.). It recommends exchanges of experience between its members in this area, in particular with regard to raising awareness among women and men on equal rights and on combating violence against women. To this end, ARLEM points out the importance of the EU's push for more and faster progress towards gender equality expressed in its Gender Action Plan III for 2021-2025.

Migration

21. While conflicts continue to be a key factor behind voluntary and forced migration, climate change is beginning to have a role in population movements. The Mediterranean Sea is a favoured route for migrants and refugees trying to build a secure future in Europe. The vast majority of these crossings end tragically: children, women and men are losing their lives, at a time when European countries have strengthened their land and sea borders and are increasing pushbacks.
22. ARLEM welcomes the migration and mobility component of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean proposed by the European Commission in February 2021, as it provides for a stronger partnership to jointly address the challenges of forced migration and irregular migration, and to promote legal and safe channels for migration and mobility.
23. ARLEM calls for greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the measures to be developed in this area.

Erasmus network of advisers

24. ARLEM recommends extending the Erasmus for Local and Regional Representatives scheme mentioned in the Committee of the Regions opinion adopted on 31 January 2018 to include elected representatives from the southern Mediterranean, thereby raising awareness among elected representatives and the general public about European issues, programmes and funding, and promoting the exchange of experience between elected representatives specialising in European issues.

Renewed partnership between the European Union and its southern neighbours

25. ARLEM welcomes the new opportunities offered by the new Agenda for the Mediterranean launched by the European Commission in February 2021; it shares the underlying spirit of partnership and cooperation to address common challenges, for the mutual benefit of the European Union and the Southern Neighbourhood countries.
26. It calls on the EU and its partner countries, when planning economic development, trade and investment in this context, to systematically take into account local and regional authorities as drivers of territorial development close to the people. Cooperation benefits must reach beyond the capitals. The existing huge regional and local disparities within neighbouring countries must not be widened, but – on the contrary – be reduced, through new initiatives.
27. To this end, ARLEM proposes that ad hoc forums for dialogue and multilevel exchange be set up between representatives of local, regional and national authorities and representatives of civil society from European and Southern Neighbourhood countries in order to promote good governance and involvement in decision-making.

The EU's 2021-2027 Financial Framework and the Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbourhood

28. ARLEM welcomes the Commission's proposal to channel up to EUR 7 billion towards implementing the agenda. By including the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus guarantees and funding under the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, up to EUR 30 billion of private and public investment in the Southern Neighbourhood could be leveraged.
29. As regards the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – "Global Europe" – with EUR 79.5 billion for EU cooperation with neighbouring countries, ARLEM welcomes the fact that at least EUR 500 million thereof will be earmarked for local authorities under the geographic pillar. In view of the greater emphasis on a geographic approach, it calls on EU delegations to consider local and regional authorities and their associations as key drivers for sustainable development, and as partners in planning.

COVID-19 vaccination

30. ARLEM is concerned to note the disparities in vaccination levels in the various countries around the Mediterranean basin, and once again reiterates the need to vaccinate people on an egalitarian basis so as to overcome this health crisis. People need easier access to COVID-19 vaccines, regardless of their nationality, ethnic origin or wealth. Along with resilience and preparedness, solidarity is key to mitigating the public health and economic impact of the pandemic. It welcomes the joint efforts already carried out to implement vaccine distribution schemes such as COVAX, but is concerned about the slow pace thereof.

Day of the Mediterranean

31. ARLEM shares the objectives of fostering a common Mediterranean identity and of raising the profile and increasing the sense of ownership of regional cooperation; it therefore welcomes the success of the first Day of the Mediterranean celebrations on 28 November, following the initiative launched in 2020 at the fifth Union for the Mediterranean Regional Forum. It would again encourage its members to hold cultural events in their local areas with a view to strengthening ties, promoting intercultural exchanges and dialogue and embracing the diversity of the region.
-