



**European Committee
of the Regions**



EURO-MEDITERRANEAN REGIONAL AND LOCAL ASSEMBLY

ACTION PLAN 2023-2025

Adopted at the 13th ARLEM plenary session on 7-8 November 2022 in Izmir, Turkey

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Climate change, new digital technologies and the energy crisis are rapidly changing society and peoples' lives. In addition, regions and cities on the three shores of the Mediterranean are grappling with challenges relating to local economic development, demographic disparities, increasing urbanisation, and the integration of migrants, among others, which have all been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Increasing inflation rates are negatively impacting the post-pandemic economic recovery of many countries.

The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine is also contributing to the exacerbation of the food price crisis; combined with the impact of climate-induced drought, this could create an even grimmer outlook for food security in the coming years. In addition, many countries' efforts to find alternatives to the energy they used to get from Russia appear to be setting back the climate agenda as new investments are being made in fossil fuels and new supply routes are being created.

Both the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine, with its consequences for energy and food that are being felt harshly in several Mediterranean countries, have demonstrated how important it is to build up resilience. This is equally true when it comes to internal societal challenges. The green and digital transition must lead to **resilient Mediterranean cities and regions** in which reaching the [Sustainable Development Goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda](#) becomes ever more a reality, step by step, and which can provide the necessary adaptation and coping mechanisms to their populations in view of external shocks and internal challenges.

Resilience must be achieved in terms of inclusive cities, climate action in the Mediterranean, and energy and food security. While ARLEM will continue to contribute, at the level of cities and regions

and their cooperation, to policies across the broad thematic range laid out in the EU's "New agenda for the Mediterranean"¹, those three topics will be ARLEM's priorities in the current term of office.

1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

During its current term of office², ARLEM will concentrate its work on the following three fields, so as to focus the assembly's work on issues 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.

1.1 Inclusive cities

In 2008, for the first time in history, the global urban population outnumbered the rural population. Although the urbanisation of the Mediterranean area is not growing at the same pace as in other areas of the world, rapid urbanisation is clearly also happening in the Mediterranean. Cities are hubs for ideas, commerce, culture, science, productivity, and social, human and economic development, but they can also be examples of the creation of social disparities, poverty, waste, insecurity, etc. They are, from this point of view, a magnifying mirror of the difficulties encountered by Mediterranean countries.

One very important aspect of cities being more resilient is their capacity to integrate newcomers. Several Mediterranean partner countries have been and are hosting a volume of refugees and migrants that is far higher in relation to their population than in most cases in the EU; some have experienced the change from functioning as a transit to a destination country. While migration competences rest with national governments, the impact of migration is local, as the majority of migrants and refugees settle in cities. In order to avoid friction and to harness the potential that these flows and the related diversity bring for innovation, local economic development and prosperity, cities' commitment to and action for the inclusion of migrants and refugees is key. Local and regional authorities also need support for such measures.

Projects such as *Mediterranean city-to-city migration* – supporting urban migration governance – led by ICMPD, UN-Habitat and UCLG have highlighted and supported a wealth of measures including in the fields of protection, employment, health and culture. Beyond migration, it is also being open and granting opportunities to youth, women and vulnerable groups that makes cities inclusive, as well as the degree to which citizens from all walks of life can actively participate in the common public sphere.

During 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 (*ARLEM award: Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*), focusing on the link between them. The objectives of the award are threefold: to showcase a successful example of youth entrepreneurship in

¹ European Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: [Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood – a new agenda for the Mediterranean](#), JOIN(2021) 2 final of 9.2.202. [Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions](#) adopted on 30 June-1 July 2021 (CIVEX-VII/010)

² The current term of office runs until 25 February 2025.

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; and 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.

Next year, ARLEM could envision an updated thematic report on sustainable urban development, following on from ARLEM's previous two thematic reports in this field (see appendix), as well as from the presentation and discussion of the UfM Strategic Urban Development Action Plan 2040 at a recent ARLEM commission meeting. With this, ARLEM is looking forward to bringing the voice of local and regional authorities to the table at the forthcoming third UfM ministerial conference on sustainable urban development, to be held in Zadar, Croatia, in May 2023, and to contributing to the related policy conference.

Finally, in the light of recent disaster experiences and given the key role of the local and regional level in preparedness and responses to natural and man-made disasters, ARLEM could, during this term, draw up a report on civil protection. This topic was designated as one of the five priorities for the UfM in the years ahead at the fifth Regional Forum of the UfM and is the only one among those five that ARLEM has not yet worked on (see also appendix). Well-functioning civil protection mechanisms at the level of cities and regions contribute to their resilience.

1.2 Climate action in the Mediterranean

Closely related to the topic of civil protection is the issue of the effects of climate change in the Mediterranean. In that region, the global maximum goal of a 1.5-degree warming is about to be surpassed and the effects of global warming are being harshly felt (water scarcity, decline in biodiversity, soil degradation, extreme weather events/ floods/ fires...).

In the context of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, regions and cities need to make an active commitment, deliver practical contributions and show real solidarity in order to end poverty, protect the planet from degradation, lay the foundations for prosperity and foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies. To that end, it is of paramount importance to localise the Sustainable Development Goals through policies tailored to local needs and improved ownership by local and regional players. 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 (COP26) to the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) was a step in this direction, by including in the Glasgow Climate Pact "the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action"³, and COP27 in Egypt should reinforce this message and provide guidance on its implementation.

The UNFCCC COP27 being held in a Mediterranean partner country will be an opportunity for the Egyptian presidency to bring to the table the specific issues they are facing. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working group II report on Impacts, Adaptation

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https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf.

and Vulnerability pointed out that the annual cost of adaptation in developing countries could rise to between USD 140 billion and USD 300 billion by 2030.

Following the call from developing countries, COP26 noted with regret that developed country parties had failed to meet the "USD 100 billion per year" goal. The COP agreed on a *Climate Finance Delivery Plan: Meeting the US\$100 Billion Goal by 2025*; this should be put into effect to guide countries' adaptation efforts.

It is worth noting that the EU is already the largest provider of international climate finance. In 2020, the EU and its 27 Member States committed EUR 23.39 billion in climate finance to support developing countries in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change. During COP26, the European Commission announced a new pledge of EUR 100 million in finance for the Adaptation Fund.

The "European Green Deal" is a roadmap to realign Europe's economy with the trajectory to net zero, delivering on the Paris Agreement and building a more sustainable and fairer society. The European Green Deal also brings a "unique opportunity for cooperation on strategic priorities"⁴. As the European Commission and the High Representative have highlighted, "the Mediterranean region is home to some of the world's best solar and wind resources, presenting unparalleled opportunities for clean energy cooperation, with hydrogen production as a new strategic priority"⁵.

Subnational climate diplomacy creates a direct connection between citizens and global affairs and can contribute to overcoming specific challenges faced in state-to-state diplomacy. As the European Committee of the Regions highlights⁶, significant and underexplored potential lies in subnational climate diplomacy to boost the recognition of the role of cities and regions in the UNFCCC framework. This is exemplified by the fact that the involvement of ARLEM members and partners in the Global South led to the reintroduction of "multilevel collaboration" in the text of the Glasgow Climate Pact at COP26. Such alliance-building between local and regional authorities from the EU, its neighbourhood and the Global South has the potential to be a decisive lever in the negotiations at COP27 and COP28.

1.3 Energy and food security

As home to an increasing population of over 500 million inhabitants, the Mediterranean region is currently facing significant energy challenges while seeking to accelerate its energy transition to deal with the climate change crisis. Driven by economic development, demographic growth, and rapid urbanisation, primary energy demand in the region is expected to rise substantially over the next 25 years. Meeting this increased energy demand as well as rising to the climate change challenge through decarbonisation – both at the core of Sustainable Development Goal 7 "ensure access to affordable,

⁴ European Commission/ High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2021): Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood. A new agenda for the Mediterranean. (JOIN(2021) 2 final of 9.2.2021) Here: p. 18.

⁵ JOIN(2021) 2 final, p. 18.

⁶ European Committee of the Regions: Draft opinion on "The CoR's role in boosting subnational climate diplomacy ahead of COP27 and COP28" (rapporteur: Olgierd Geblewicz), to be adopted at the 151st plenary session on 10-12 October 2022.

reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all" – requires a high level of multilateral responses and collective actions. Reinforced cooperation in the energy field but also in the previous priority of climate action is needed and represents an opportunity for both shores of the Mediterranean to achieve the ultimate goal of fostering integration and social and economic development in the region. The shock to global energy and food markets triggered by the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine has recently compounded the difficult economic conditions that many states in the Mediterranean region were already experiencing, contributing to a new inflationary spiral. Profound consequences at the social level are starting to be felt in cities and regions around the Mediterranean. Although the effects of this crisis on the energy landscape in the Mediterranean region cannot be captured entirely, the uncertainty around the intensity and duration of the crisis leaves doubts over the longer-term dependence on fossil fuels, the potential rise in investment spending on renewable energy projects and its consequences for the prospects of the energy transition. Blessed with great renewable energy potential, particularly owing to high levels of solar irradiation and wind throughout the region, the Mediterranean region displays unique opportunities for the energy transition, which is (slowly) gaining momentum despite mixed results and speeds. The penetration of renewable energy is still limited compared to its potential and the region requires substantial investments and a forward-looking vision to undergo a stronger – yet gradual and orderly – energy transition.

At the same time, the EU's wish for greater strategic autonomy, partly as a consequence of its experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, stands to benefit its close Mediterranean partners in terms of potential partnerships and investments around energy and related infrastructure (linked also to the [EU's Global Gateway](#)). In this regard, the Mediterranean region holds a strategic position near main energy markets and is in itself a large market.

Rethinking agri-food systems to adapt them to climate change and environmental sustainability must be a priority to reverse current trends in the Mediterranean. This approach goes hand in hand with the development of strategies related to food trade and sovereignty to meet growing demand and cope with emergency situations. The countries around the Mediterranean must find solutions to the vulnerabilities of Mediterranean food systems, to ensure greater resilience to food crises by 2030. The illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine and its consequences on the export of agriculture products from Ukraine, in particular, grain, has been a harsh reminder of the perils that the region is facing. In the context of the green transition, how can the contribution of cities and regions to a resilient energy provision through more renewables, and to a diversification away from fossil fuels, be sped up, which seems now more urgent than ever? How can sourcing become more local, also as regards food, thus strengthening food security? What about the relationship with Mediterranean partners in strategies such as the EU's Farm to Fork strategy? How can the basic needs of the local population in terms of food and energy be met, even when facing the current challenges when energy and/or food have become a huge concern for mayors and region presidents? It is these sorts of questions that ARLEM will explore in its current term of office in its statutory meetings and in other workshops.

In the current mandate, ARLEM will rigorously follow up the related recommendations in the report on *Agriculture and food security in the context of climate change in the Mediterranean*, adopted in 2021.

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.

As an assembly of local and regional representatives from the three shores of the Mediterranean, ARLEM is also a two-way communication channel bringing the cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners to the governance level closest to the citizens as well as conveying messages from the ground to the institutional formats and fora of cooperation that otherwise mainly rely on the state level. The final list of citizens' proposals in the Conference on the Future of Europe includes the call: "We propose that the EU, in particular in its actions at the international level [...], improve its accessibility for citizens through better information, education, citizen participation, and transparency of its action."⁷ ARLEM can play a very useful role here in following up citizens' expectations.

2.2 Contribution to consultative work through thematic reports

In 2023-2025, 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 associations⁸ 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 2023-2025.

The excellent cooperation with the UfM⁹ will allow ARLEM to bring the territorial aspect to the different policies of the UfM. Moreover, ARLEM will further engage as a UfM permanent observer

⁷ Conference on the Future of Europe (2022): Report on the final outcome, proposal 22 (p. 65). Available at [Conference on the Future of Europe | European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/efcd/press/2022/07/20220720-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-report-on-the-final-outcome).

⁸ 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).

⁹ Declaration of Intent between ARLEM and the UfM Secretariat signed in 2013.

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 continue 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 – Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the Intermediterranean Commission of CPMR, MedCities, Eurochambres, Womenpreneur and Anima Invest.

ARLEM is open to continuing its collaboration with the European Training Foundation (ETF)¹⁰ and the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA).

4. THE OPERATIONAL DIMENSION

- Every year, not more than two thematic reports will be drawn up, 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 (EWRC). ARLEM members will contribute to the next edition of the Forum *Cities and Regions for International Partnerships*. This forum is co-organised every other year by the European Commission and the European Committee of the Regions and the next edition is scheduled for the second half of 2023.
- 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 10 or 20-page study. 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

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

¹⁰ Declaration of Intent between ARLEM and the ETF signed in 2013.

approval of ARLEM co-chairs. The timetable will be updated during the course of the reference period.

The ARLEM plenary session generally meets once a year; as of this current term of office its meeting is scheduled in the lead-up to the Day of the Mediterranean (28 November). 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.

2022

7-8 November, Izmir, Türkiye

- 13th ARLEM plenary session, preceded by coordination meetings and the 27th ARLEM Bureau meeting
- Adoption of the draft ARLEM reports on *Service sector reorientation: transferring skills from and to the tourism sector* and 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*
- Adoption of the 2023-2025 Action plan
- Adoption of political recommendations for 2023
- Ceremony of the *ARLEM Award 2022 - Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*

24 November, Barcelona, Spain

- Seventh Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean

28 November

- International Day of the Mediterranean (launched at the 5th UfM Regional Forum in 2020 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration)

Throughout the year

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

2023

May

- Third UfM Ministerial Conference on Sustainable Urban Development with UfM policy conference (tbc), Zadar, Croatia

Spring

- 9th meeting of the ARLEM Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development in Morocco

Second half of 2023

- Forum "Cities and Regions for International Partnerships"

October

- Potential workshop/ARLEM members participating in the European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels (tbc)

End October/ November

- 14th ARLEM plenary session in Sardinia, preceded by ARLEM Bureau meeting
- Adoption of the draft ARLEM reports
- Adoption of political recommendations for 2024
- Ceremony of the *ARLEM Award 2023 - Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*

- UfM regional forum (tbc)

Throughout the year

- UfM SOMs/ad hoc SOMs: follow-up and participation of ARLEM secretariat as appropriate

2024

Spring

- 10th meeting of the ARLEM Commission for Sustainable Territorial Development

October

- Potential workshop/ARLEM members participating in the European Week of Regions and Cities, Brussels (tbc)

November

- 15th ARLEM plenary session, preceded by ARLEM Bureau meeting
- Adoption of the draft ARLEM reports
- Adoption of political recommendations for 2025
- Ceremony of the *ARLEM Award 2024 - Young local entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean*

- UfM regional forum (tbc)

Throughout the year

- 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 2010-2022

(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) ¹¹
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)	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)

¹¹ 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)	Lizzy Delaricha (Ganei Tikva/IL)
Service sector reorientation: transferring skills from and to the tourism sector (2022 tbc)	Mohamed Boudra (UCLG/MA)
Innovation ecosystems and start-ups in the Mediterranean as drivers of socio-economic recovery, digital transformation and sustainable development following the COVID-19 crisis (2022 tbc)	Juan Manuel Moreno Bonilla (Andalusia/ES – AEBR)
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)