

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 — A disaster risk-informed approach for all EU policies**

(2017/C 272/07)

**Rapporteur:** Adam Banaszak (PL/ECR), Vice-President of the Kujawsko-Pomorskie Regional Assembly

**Reference document:** Commission Staff Working Document: Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 — A disaster risk-informed approach for all EU policies;

SWD(2016) 205 final

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS (CoR)

1. welcomes the Commission staff working document concerning the Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, as it specifically underlines the role of local and regional authorities in supporting countries' efforts to reduce disaster risks;
2. underlines the fact that disaster resilience is one of the key aspects of sustainable development; in this connection, calls on the institutions of the European Union to ensure that this principle is one of the central pillars of future sustainable development measures in Europe and to take it into account in future EU funds and projects;
3. notes that the intensity and frequency of disasters has increased significantly over the past decade. Each year tens of thousands of people around the world lose their lives as a result of natural disasters and the direct costs borne by EU countries run to tens of billions of euros, with the number of fatalities tending to be higher in developing countries and economic losses greater in developed economies;
4. endorses the support for national, regional and local risk management strategies and plans aimed, inter alia, at establishing objectives, benchmarks and time frames, and stresses the need to evaluate existing strategies and plans in order to include the provisions of the Sendai Framework. For border regions effective coordination between such strategies or development of joint cross-border strategies is essential and should be encouraged;
5. underlines that it is *more* cost efficient to build disaster resilient infrastructure than to retro-fit unsafe structures. UNISDR estimates that the cost/benefit ratio is 1:4;
6. recognises the urgency of meeting 2020 priority targets set out by the SDGs<sup>(1)</sup> (11b) and Sendai Framework, to substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing *integrated* policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework, holistic disaster risk management at all levels;
7. stresses that all EU projects relating to construction of new infrastructure (whether they be *implemented* through regional policy funds or through the European Fund for Strategic Investments) should be resilient to disasters; calls for this principle to be mentioned explicitly in rules on how funds are used;

<sup>(1)</sup> Sustainable Development Goals.

8. draws attention to the need to allocate adequate financial resources to disaster risk reduction at local, regional and national level. Civil protection is often devolved to local and regional government *without* sufficient funds to meet the needs. Local and regional authorities require appropriate resources and decision-making powers. Sufficient resources need to be allocated also to the programmes supporting cross-border cooperation in the field of disaster risk reduction and crisis management;

9. strongly supports the European Commission's proposal of 30 November 2016 (COM(2016) 778), which would enable a stronger show of EU solidarity in response to major or regional natural disasters; calls for a review of the definition of major or regional natural disasters under Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 establishing the European Union Solidarity Fund, cited in the Commission proposal; points out that the thresholds for major disasters set out in the definition — damage over EUR 3 billion or more than 0,6 % of the GDP of the state concerned — are too high and constitute an obstacle, especially for the smaller and less developed regions that most often need to get financial support;

10. stresses that local and regional authorities play a key role in disaster risk management and disaster management, and takes note of the role and importance of local and regional platforms in mitigating the risk of disasters and the legitimate part they play in this process;

11. notes that optimisation of risk management depends on cooperation between local government and national stakeholders, on the one hand, and private stakeholders, on the other, including insurance companies;

12. at the same time, points out that the geostrategic position of some regions, such as the outermost regions (ORs), makes them leading European actors for urgent intervention beyond the EU's borders, but also for risk prevention measures;

13. disasters do not respect regional or national borders, and so a protocol is needed for coordinated action in the event of disasters affecting two or more countries. Coordination is vital, especially in situations where those affected include third countries;

14. recognises that the issue of natural disasters forms an integral part of activities aimed at dealing with the impact of climate change, and both areas should be examined together; suggests that the new Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy increases its activity in this area and provides further support for climate adaptation that also builds resilience at local level; reiterates its support to the Covenant and also to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction's 'Making Cities Resilient' campaign. In order to help attract the attention of cities and regions to the 'Making Cities Resilient' campaign, suggests appointing Resilient Cities Ambassadors, who would benefit from the support of the CoR;

15. welcomes the reference made in Commission Communication COM(2016) 739, published in November 2016, to the need to take account of reducing the risk of natural disasters, but finds it regrettable that this document fails to emphasise that disaster resilience is one of the cornerstones of sustainable development in the European Union <sup>(2)</sup>;

### Understanding disasters risk

16. underlines the moral duty to ensure that EU projects do not put human life at risk by funding infrastructure projects which might not be resilient to disasters; in addition, stresses that it is more effective financially to build disaster-resilient infrastructure than to upgrade infrastructure which does not comply with safety standards;

17. welcomes the recent reform of the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF), the EU's financial mechanism to provide support in the event of a major disaster and the EU's main tool for responding to natural disasters; highlights the importance of the EUSF as a tool for responding to major natural disasters and expressing European solidarity with disaster-stricken regions within Europe; welcomes that in line with the CoR recommendations, the Fund can be used to build disaster resilience into effected infrastructure. While welcoming the extension of the deadlines for its use, underlines that a 2-year deadline would better enable the effective use of the Fund <sup>(3)</sup>; believes, furthermore, that the financial support mechanism should establish lower thresholds enabling both local and regional bodies to access it;

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<sup>(2)</sup> Commission communication, Next steps for a sustainable European future, European action for sustainability (COM(2016) 739 final).

<sup>(3)</sup> CDR6402-2013\_00\_00\_TRA\_AC.

18. in the case of development cooperation, information should be disseminated to raise awareness of the fact that emergency preparedness and response is the responsibility of the authorities and the population;
19. supports the EC action plan's cross-cutting approach, enabling the Sendai Framework's objectives to be mainstreamed in other EU policies, thus bridging the gap between the global Sendai Framework and the EU Civil Protection Mechanism;
20. notes that the EC action plan takes into account the contribution of all EU policies and practices, not just civil protection policy, to meeting the priorities agreed at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction;
21. acknowledges that the basis of a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to policy-making informed by the risk of disasters is the creation of 5-year action plans, which should be aimed at involving the whole of society and promoting and improving knowledge of risks, risk-related investments and disaster preparedness and resilience, and reinforcing the EU priorities in the areas of competitiveness, research and innovation and supporting resilient sustainable development; promoting the use of IT communication technologies, ICT and automatic early warning networks, based on early detection, instant communication and proactive intervention protocols;
22. notes that projects supported and implemented as part of the plan can help create synergies between disaster risk reduction and climate change strategies, and help strengthen the capacities of cities to deal with disaster risks;
23. recommends drawing up action plans in accordance with other international agreements and processes concluded or implemented in 2015 and 2016, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda financing for development, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, the World Humanitarian Summit and the New Urban Agenda;
24. highlights the significant role played by cooperation with the private sector as regards collecting and sharing loss and damage data, and by the strengthening of links between strategies for disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and biodiversity;
25. emphasises the importance of ensuring that all EU financial instruments promote investments based on risk resilience, and underlines support for early warning systems, measures to improve redundant technologies used for communicating between civil protection systems and public warnings as well as a 'build back better' approach following disasters;

#### **Local and regional authorities as key partners in disasters risk reduction**

26. stresses that local and regional authorities have an institutional and political responsibility to protect the public and are a first line of response in crisis situations, ensuring basic services and oversight and managing disasters as they happen. They are responsible for prevention, organising an immediate response and rescue operations and, most importantly, they have at their disposal detailed knowledge of the local area and community; local and regional authorities are also responsible for the subsequent reconstruction work.
27. points out that local and regional authorities have often demonstrated a tremendous commitment to reducing disaster risks, for instance by helping to draw up risk assessments and risk management plans, as pointed out in the CoR opinion on the EU Civil Protection Mechanism<sup>(4)</sup>;
28. highlights the importance of developing interregional cooperation in order to prevent disaster risks, particularly under civil protection policy; considers it appropriate that the Commission contribute, by improving coordination between regions, to making this cooperation even more efficient and effective, setting standards for the models and technologies used by these cities and regions to improve their response to emergencies that cut across borders or exceed the capacities of administrative units;

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<sup>(4)</sup> CDR740-2012\_FIN\_AC.

29. notes that another desirable basis for cooperation in this area is the development of a public-private partnership for disaster risk reduction and the adoption of measures to encourage the private sector to understand local risks and to become a stakeholder in future disaster risk reduction policies, for example by expanding the provision of insurance; reiterates its concern that as a result of increasing risks, insurance might become unavailable or unaffordable in certain areas leaving public authorities with potentially huge financial exposure. Underlines that pooling of risk is an option that should be explored and calls for the feasibility of a compulsory natural disaster insurance scheme to be explored <sup>(5)</sup>;

30. regards as legitimate efforts to make full use of the growing role of mobile technology, the internet and social media in communicating disaster-related information, especially efforts to strengthen AML (Advanced Mobile Location) technology, which enables calls to the European emergency number 112 to be traced immediately; the use of these technologies is equally important for the development of disaster-prevention and training campaigns;

31. calls for an effective disaster information policy, which may help prevent damage if similar events are likely to happen or disasters are likely to reoccur; moreover, considers it essential to offer protection and material and psychological support to victims, family members, those providing assistance and others affected by disasters;

32. emphasises that local and regional authorities require knowledge, tools, capacity and resources to meet their obligations as specified in the CoR opinion on the Post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action; at the same time, points out that, while local authorities are responsible for a wide range of critical infrastructure, investments to make it more resilient to the risk of disasters are not very visible, such investments are often neglected or obstacles are placed in the way of their implementation <sup>(6)</sup>;

33. calls for steps to be taken to raise public awareness, inter alia, by carrying out research into disaster risk management. It is recommended to make the residents of the endangered areas aware of the necessity to show solidarity with the residents of the areas prone to disasters. There is currently little understanding of how risks can escalate;

34. underlines the importance of local and regional authorities developing networks of meteorological measuring stations, in connection with the know-how, tools, capacities and resources needed to meet their obligations, as spelt out in the CoR opinion on the post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action. These networks must be able to monitor variables used to provide an accurate assessment of climate change, as well all those variables which enable disasters to be monitored and early warnings to be provided;

#### **The new priority axis as a sound eu response to the increase in the frequency of disasters**

35. strongly supports the European Commission's proposal (COM(2016) 778 final) to create a new priority axis with a funding rate of up to 100 % to support, within the framework of ERDF investment priorities, measures for predicting, preventing and planning for major or regional natural disasters and for responding to and recovering from such disasters;

36. supports the proposals to make expenditure for this purpose eligible for funding from the moment a disaster occurs, even if this is before the regulation enters into force;

#### **Subsidiarity and proportionality**

37. the Commission staff working document is in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; underlines that disasters know no borders and in turn, disaster resilience is an area where coordinated action is needed. Civil protection is an area where the EU acts to support, coordinate or supplement the action of its Member States (Article 6 TFEU). In line with Article 196 TFEU, the Union may act without resorting to harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.

Brussels, 23 March 2017.

*The President  
of the European Committee of the Regions*

Markku MARKKULA

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<sup>(5)</sup> For more on the role of insurance in disaster recovery, please see CoR opinion COR-2014-02646.

<sup>(6)</sup> COR-2014-02646-00-01-AC-TRA.