BACKGROUND

For more than 15 years, ICLEI Europe has supported cities, towns and regions to develop adaptation and resilience strategies and action plans, and to integrate them into statutory planning processes, ultimately improving cities’ ability to safeguard citizens from the consequences of climate change induced, man-made and natural hazards.

To share the best practices in the adaptation and resilience journey of cities and regions, ICLEI Europe, together with the European Environment Agency, has been organising the European Urban Resilience Forum (EURESFO) for the last 11 years.

Over this period and increasingly, European cities and regions have faced worsening and intertwined impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, COVID-19 pandemic, wars in the region, scarcity in resources and broken supply chains resulting in increasing stress on their societies and systems. ICLEI Europe, its member and partner cities and regions have understood the utmost importance of place-based, demand-driven, holistic approach in addressing adaptation and resilience at the local level.

This document aims to provide recommendations to the EU’s Strategic Agenda 2024 - 2029 in order to mainstream resilience and adaptation across various policy areas and governance layers. These recommendations are building on ICLEI Europe’s decades-long experience, as well as the goals of the EU Adaptation Strategy, the assessment of the data published in Copernicus’ European State of the Climate Report 2023¹ and drawing on the European Environment Agency’s first-ever European Climate Risk Assessment (EUCRA)².

¹ https://climate.copernicus.eu/esotc/2023
RECOMMENDATIONS

✪ Resilience and climate change adaptation go hand-in-hand: The EU has experienced the consequences of the resilience complexity deriving from interconnected risks and crises, including - but not limited to - climate change, armed conflicts, pandemics, biodiversity loss, energy security and economic instability. This experience should formally be recognised by translation into a comprehensive EU Resilience Strategy which builds on the European Climate Risk Assessment but goes beyond adaptation to the changing climate and prepare regions, cities and communities for a resilient transformation.

In this regard, the Belgian Climate and Environmental Risk Assessment Centre (CERAC) established during the Belgian EU Presidency can inspire EU level assessment and policy consideration. The methodology used by CERAC builds on indicators that consider non-climatic risk drivers as key factors of compounding, cascading, multi-sectoral and cross-border risks and make concrete reference to implementation approaches for the localisation of this methodology.

✪ Multilevel governance approaches for resilience building must be supported and mainstreamed throughout Europe: Cities and regions are at the frontline of disasters, pandemics, wars, and the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, and they also act as frontrunners in establishing mechanisms, structures and policies to address interconnected risks and crises. While recognising and embracing the diversity of local, metropolitan, regional and national governance models among different Member States, the EU should establish an ambitious and consistent framework to multilevel governance in its resilience and adaptation policies and legislations. The EUCRA analysis of resilience policy co-ownership between EU and Member States is a great tool to accelerate legislative change thus enabling resilience building at all levels. However, the EU Commission must enable a governance framework that ensures representation of all levels in relevant dialogues on strategic national planning and budget allocation. This could be done by strengthening the multilevel stakeholder dialogue requirements under Article 11 of the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action legislation; and through establishing structured and permanent multilevel dialogues. Such a multilevel governance approach will ensure the co-creation of resilience plans and the minimisation of social, institutional and financial barriers. To guarantee a harmonised approach and reporting framework, Member States should integrate local and regional resilience strategies into progress monitoring.

✪ EU legislation on resilience should support cities in pursuing the place-based, people-centred and just approach to transformation: Consistently, these characteristics have proven powerful to deliver successful, sustainable resilience programmes often putting culture and innovative nature-based, digital and socially innovative solutions at the of transformative resilience action. Such an approach recognises and promotes diversity as a key component in the implementation of resilient infrastructure and must be included in related monitoring frameworks. Missing one of these key principles is putting the resilience journey at risk of shortcomings, often leading to “maladaptation”.

✪ Transparency and inclusiveness are key values for implementing a transformation towards resilience: Including communities, particularly the most vulnerable and the most risk-exposed ones, in resilience decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation has proven to maximise social acceptance, thus fostering a just transformation to a resilient Europe. Therefore, it is crucial to mainstream community participation and to include it in an integrated assessment of resilience as a key indicator for its monitoring processes.

3 The EUCRA and the technical paper on just resilience in Europe by the EEA warn that EU policy and plans on resilience give little or no attention to recognitional justice, while partially including its distributional or procedural component.
Resilience and adaptation must be mainstreamed across legislation and funding programmes:
The EU in its 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework has adopted the climate mainstreaming approach which means EU programmes in all policy areas have to consider climate priorities in their design, implementation and evaluation phases. Still, in 2024, the EU falls short of addressing the adaptation and resilience needs across its (sectoral) legislation and funding programmes.

For instance, the EU Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action, agreed in 2018, aims to implement the EU climate and energy targets at the national level. It includes a section on adaptation in the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) templates and provides an important opportunity to mainstream climate adaptation and resilience across sectoral climate and energy transition action. In practice, many Member States fail to mainstream adaptation and resilience across their NECPs and the template for Member States’ National long-term Strategies do not include any reference or a section related to adaptation and resilience. This represents an important gap in the design of Member States’ plans to reach climate neutrality by 2050.

To mainstream adaptation and resilience in EU sectoral legislation, the Governance Regulation should strengthen the requirements about including adaptation and resilience policies across all climate and energy transition plans. This should also go hand in hand with a multilevel governance approach where the regional and local plans should be integrated with national plans and frameworks that are key for the adaptation and resilience of infrastructures and ecosystems.

In order to ensure that climate adaptation and resilience receive the needed attention in budgets and investments across the EU and its Member States, the next EU multiannual financial framework should increase the amount earmarked for climate action, and differentiate between mitigation, adaptation and resilience across the different sectors.

EU programmes and initiatives should reach regions, cities and communities in a coordinated way: There is a risk that support and opportunities provided to cities and regions provided at the European level - whilst carrying great potential, including the EU Missions for ‘Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities’ and on ‘Adaptation to Climate Change’ - to be inefficient due to lack of coordination. Their interconnectedness and coordination needs increase and resilience put as a central and intertwined objective, particularly as they have the same ‘landing territories’ and implementation is often reached through combined, integrated action. Collaboration between stakeholders involved in the implementation of these programmes and initiatives at all levels has to be explicitly required, encouraged and coordinated. The European Commission should ensure the stakeholders key to implementation and financing have space and resources to collaborate across the different initiatives, programmes and projects. An enabling environment should be created to allow cross-project and cross-programme flexibility and consideration of common objectives and potential synergies rather than different processes, building on each initiative’s particular strengths and offerings.

‘Water’ must be a central pillar for building resilience in Europe: In line with the EUCRA analysis of interconnection and risk transmission pathways, water should be considered as the main cross-cutting field to build resilience. Looking at the most recent alarming data on climate change, it is also clear that action can wait no longer: due to climate change, regions, cities and communities are exposed to either too much water, too little water or water pollution. For these reasons, we strongly support the call for a new and binding EU Climate and Water Resilience Law. The law should acknowledge the complex jurisdiction over water resources (and water-related threats) and support multilevel governance as well as cross-border collaboration. The European Commission should ensure the involvement of local and regional perspectives in its elaboration of a 2050 Water Resilience perspective which should be enshrined in law through a proposal of an EU Water Resilience Law.
The EU should champion the development of resilience standards fostering European values in global markets: Mainstreaming resilience and adaptation requires rapid uptake of innovative solutions. For this to happen, producers and service providers need market perspectives and scale suggesting standardised solutions in resilience practices, methodologies, processes and technologies. But also, cities and regions need access to available solutions. Investment into EU Research and Innovation generates digital, nature-based and socially innovative solutions as well as management system approaches and methods related to all aspects of resilience and adaptation. European standardisation should help mobilise EU R&I results not only addressing building and construction standards (Eurocode), but also those supporting planning and engagement processes addressing public health, safety, and management of (climate-related) risks. The development of European standards and their promotion in international standardisation bodies can ensure that Europe’s voice is heard and its values are introduced in international markets.

European resilience will only be possible if collaboration across borders is encouraged and supported within and beyond the EU: European institutions should acknowledge the cross-border nature of risks, and the interconnectedness of resilience action as well as regional vulnerabilities. They should tackle them through an integrated approach that supports the valorisation of European diversity while providing equal opportunities and tailored solutions. In particular, drawing on the detailed analysis in the EUCRA, particular attention should be given to cross-border threats to human health. The EU should coordinate and monitor actions aimed at cross-border collaboration among its Member States and with neighbouring countries. The establishment of dedicated programmes and funding is essential to provide institutionalised spaces for collaboration and learning outside regulatory limitations.

At the global level, the EU should lead on the approaches to address loss and damage and support recovery, while enabling long-term resilience, and quickly reaching the most vulnerable and promote the CHAMP Coalition of Higher Ambition Multilevel Partnership initiative (CHAMP) – not at least by driving its roll-out in EU Member States.

Resilience must be the core element of any recovery process: EU guidelines and recommendations should ensure that resilience principles, values and methodologies are applied when supporting the regional and urban recovery from any type of disaster. These principles must be taken as opportunities for pursuing a transformational resilience pathway by leveraging enabling conditions, such as knowledge and data, governance, finance and resources, and behavioural change. In particular, it is urgent to make resilience employing these principles a cornerstone of the ongoing and post-conflict recovery in Ukraine. Recovery of Ukrainian Cities offers an opportunity to become a reference for the whole of Europe and beyond if resilience maturity targets are set in line with the ambitious goals of the EU Adaptation Mission (thus building on the tools, platforms and knowledge developed by Mission projects) and included in the Ukraine Facility.

As in the plans for the reconstruction of Ukraine.
CONCLUSIONS

As the world experiences more and more extreme climate events and institutions keep reminding us that action can wait no longer\(^5\), mitigation needs to be complemented by adaptation action to ensure a just transition. Urgently, adaptation and resilience must be built at the local and regional level, mainstreamed across the EU and national legislation and financed properly to minimise risks, protect vulnerable populations, and ensure the sustainability of our societies. Under the EU 2024-2029 Strategic Work Plan, the EU should emphasise its commitment to mitigation, adaptation and resilience action and its support to implementation at local and regional levels.

The recommendations above aim to emphasise that building resilience is a multifaceted and multilevel matter that encompasses different sectors of society and layers of government. In order to achieve its resilience goals by mid-century\(^6\), the European Union should ensure that i) resilience is treated as a comprehensive issue that goes beyond climate adaptation, ii) diverse policies include resilience as a cross-cutting topic to measure their achievements, giving particular attention to water, iii) multilevel governance models are established to accelerate resilience processes and increase their impact, iv) resilience is considered an international priority and that collaboration is not limited by administrative boundaries.

To ensure a just resilience across European cities and regions, ICLEI Europe stands ready to work with the European institutions and national governments.

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\(^6\) The EU Adaptation Strategy aims to make Europe the first resilient continent in the World by 2050.

RESOURCES


