EUROPEAN UNION

Committee of the Regions

20 YEARS

107th plenary session, 25-26 June 2014

OPINION

Post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

−   recognises that LRAs hold institutional and political responsibility to protect their citizens and are often the first level of governance to respond in case of emergency by providing basic services and oversight and managing disasters as they happen. LRAs are the frontline of disaster management, responsible for prevention and immediate response and rescue operations;

−   calls on LRAs to fully apply open data policy and permit defence, security or commercial reasons to withhold information only when legitimate and strictly necessary. Commercial interests should not take precedence over public safety and wellbeing;

−   recommends further collaboration and investment in information systems and working with the private sector (who hold significant disaster-related information) so that disaster and disaster management data can be recorded, retrieved, analysed and used to plan for and mitigate the effects of future disasters;

−   recognises the increasing role of mobile technology, the internet and social media in communicating disaster information and calls for further studies to be made of best practice in the use of digital communications in disasters.

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Opinion of the Committee of the Regions – Post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience

I.   POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General comments

1.   welcomes the Communication from the Commission, as disasters have major economic, social, ecological and security impacts and pose enormous challenges for local and regional authorities (LRAs);

2.   recognises that risk prevention and management policies are essential to ensure economic growth and sustainable development whilst protecting people and that a renewed international framework for disaster risk reduction will significantly help to address future challenges, including those resulting from climate change, recognising the role of the European Union and its local and regional authorities in mitigating and adapting to climate change and in building resilient infrastructure;

3.   notes with concern that in recent years, disasters have increased significantly in both frequency and intensity. Between 2002 and 2012, natural disasters caused more than 100 000 deaths annually on average and there is an increasing trend in direct overall economic losses worldwide, with an average annual economic loss of over EUR 100 billion. Whilst all countries are vulnerable, developing countries suffer greater loss of life and developed nations bear higher economic costs. Within the EU natural disasters caused 80 000 deaths and EUR 95 billion in economic losses over the last decade;

4.   observes that although the EU now plays a more active role in the field of civil protection after the entry into force of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, EU experience is made more complex by the wide, diversified panorama of administrative and legal systems that manage the different national civil protection mechanisms throughout the EU;

Understanding disasters – data, targets and indicators

5.   acknowledges that the impacts of all types of disasters can be reduced by disaster risk management and building in resilience to existing and future infrastructures, however policy makers face difficult fiscal, environmental, social and cultural choices about how to ensure basic safety and quality of life with the threat of disasters, whether natural hazards or deliberate attacks. At the same time, it is necessary to pay special attention to emerging challenges;

6.   considers that coastal and maritime areas face additional challenges in disaster risk reduction. Exposed to rising seas levels, ocean warming, high waves, prolonged rain or wild fire, these locations are often less accessible and rescue operations may be more complicated than elsewhere. Calls on the EU to reflect on this vulnerability in the context of the EU strategy for coastal and maritime tourism. Similarly, geographically and demographically challenged regions face additional challenges, as do mountainous areas and areas of special environmental value; these areas can also be at greater risk to natural disasters, such as landslides, forest fires and draught, which make prevention, preparedness and intervention measures complex;

7.   observes that tragic and fatal consequences of catastrophes in Europe are often exacerbated by two major factors: the territory's intrinsic fragility and unsuitable development in the past;

8.   calls for a renewed commitment to integrate policies for disaster risk reduction into sectoral and development plans to ensure a comprehensive approach to resilience building;

9.   recognises that access to full, reliable and accurate information is essential to understanding disasters and to capturing learning to put in place plans to build resilience, mitigating the impact of future events and to building cases for financial investment. Although risk and hazard reports are collected, their integration both within and between countries requires improvement;

10.   calls on LRAs to fully apply open data policy and permit defence, security or commercial reasons to withhold information only when legitimate and strictly necessary. Commercial interests should not take precedence over public safety and wellbeing;

11.   recommends further collaboration and investment in information systems, as well as their connection across borders and working with the private sector (who hold significant disaster-related information) so that disaster and disaster management data can be recorded, retrieved, analysed and used to plan for and mitigate the effects of future disasters;

Accountability, Transparency and Governance – decision protocols and escalation

12.   recognises that LRAs hold institutional and political responsibility to protect their citizens and is often the first level of governance to respond in case of emergency by providing basic services and oversight and managing disasters as they happen. LRAs are the frontline of disaster management, responsible for prevention and immediate response and rescue operations and have detailed knowledge of their locality and communities. They need knowledge, tools, capacities and resources to meet their responsibilities to protect life, property, the economy and the environment;

13.   observes that responsibility for civil protection is often devolved to the local and regional level without sufficient funds to meet the needs and calls on national governments to match the duties with adequate funding;

14.   calls for a wide-reaching study on how best to enhance local authorities' capacity and boost their participation in resilience and disaster risk reduction decision-making;

15.   acknowledges that disasters can be local, regional, national or international in scale and impact and therefore recommends that, protocols are put in place to ensure better coordination between regional and national disaster risk policies and plans, improved integration of local policy-makers and planners and agreed escalation procedures for disasters that impact over more than one regional area; notes that risk factors can be quantified and underlines that population density impacts risk;

16.   draws attention to cross-border threats and disasters striking regions in two or more EU Member States and call for an improved cooperation between neighbouring regions to ensure that prevention efforts are shared and response activities coordinated. At the local and regional level, effective information systems need to be created in border areas that will deliver information across frontiers in real time and connect bodies responsible for crisis management;

The role of local and regional authorities in disasters

17.   observes that LRAs have three distinct roles in relation to disaster management:

        −   Prevention and Preparedness
        −   Response coordination and communications
        −   Recovery

A) Prevention and Preparedness

18.   advocates that investment in enhancing preparedness and resilience, weighing up the probability of disaster is the most effective and cost-effective way to reduce the impact and cost of responding to and recovering from disasters. This includes investing in resilient infrastructure that will withstand disasters including buildings, transport (road, rail, airports), services (communications, energy supplies, water supplies, sewerage) and social infrastructure;

19.   points out that the EU has a Solidarity Fund for providing disaster assistance and is pleased that the changes to the regulation proposed by the Committee of the Regions have been incorporated into the final version[1]. It is now possible under the fund, for example, to restore

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[1]   CDR6402-2013_00_00_TRA_AC.

damaged infrastructure to a state in which it will be better able to withstand future disasters, or – indeed – to relocate infrastructure. However, the Committee of the Regions calls for the Solidarity Fund to be allocated adequate financial resources in the EU budget. The Committee of the Regions also calls on the Member States to make the best possible use of the opportunities for funding of disaster risk prevention and risk management projects prepared within the 2014-2020 framework;

20. understands that a change in approach away from a focus on response and recovery to prevention, preparedness and resilience requires a new mentality and approach to allocating financial resources. It requires planned up-front investment rather than reactive expenditure. This approach, weighing up the probability of disaster, will be more cost-effective and beneficial in the longer term;

21. recognises the difficulties of quantifying, measuring and valuing the resilience of communities (except after a disaster has occurred) and in making a business case for resilience investment;

22. strongly believes that applying construction codes, carefully planning and monitoring the use of land may significantly reduce vulnerability;

23. invites the Commission to undertake research and produce guidance about LRAs can best ensure that all developments (including buildings, transport and services) are planned with resilience at their core; recognising LRAs carry the responsibility to monitor the application of and compliance with resilient design standards;

24. recognises that despite resilience, with a sensible evaluation of the probability of potential disaster, being cost-effective in the long term, disaster resilient development can require substantial seed funding. Safer structures require design changes that typically cost 10 to 50% more to build (and more if energy grid, transport or water networks need to be relocated); emphasises that action now is far more cost-effective than retrofitting unsafe buildings. UNISDR estimates that the cost/benefit ratio is 1:4. In addition, new resilient systems require new technology and training, which are often not readily available in less developed regions;

25. calls for LRAs to assess the resilience of existing structure, particularly those housing essential services such as hospitals and water treatment plants;

26. calls for the Commission to conduct a study on how best to develop resilient communities who are prepared, equipped and able to support themselves when disasters occur;

27. welcomes the Commission's focus on resilience and concurs that it enables local , regional and national authorities to better prepare for disasters through contingency planning and risk assessment (by LRA, businesses and other groups) to reduce disaster losses rather than waiting for an event to occur and paying for it afterwards;

28.   pledges support for the UN 'Resilient Cities Campaign' and its self-assessment tool, enabling local government to check their resilience against a set of 10 essentials;

29.   takes note of the UNISDR 2012 *Venice Declaration on building resilience at the local level towards protected cultural heritage and climate change adaptation strategies* and the need to reflect on how to better protect heritage from disasters;

30.   recognises that disasters will continue to occur and may well increase in the future. The consensus reports on climate change issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that there is little doubt as to the need to plan and build infrastructure that can respond to the reality of climate change;

B) Response coordination and communications

31.   observes that many disasters are characterised by poor communication and management. Managing a disaster is an interdisciplinary task involving a range of organisations. Strongly welcomes, therefore, the inclusion in the text of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism of provisions establishing training programme for members of intervention teams and workshops, seminars and pilot projects for developing civil protection leaders;

32.   encourages LRAs to recognise the often underestimated role that the voluntary and community sector can play in providing resilience after a disaster, and to put in place plans to develop and draw upon this resource. Informed and aware citizens are a key component in building resilience; acknowledges that there is a significant gender dimension in building resilient communities;

33.   acknowledges that the LRA has the duty to keep its community informed of potential and arising risks and to plan ahead with relevant stakeholders on how to communicate these threats without stoking fear or turning prospective businesses away;

34.   recognises the increasing role of mobile technology, the internet and social media in communicating disaster information and calls for further studies to be made of best practice in the use of digital communications in disasters. Digital communication is increasingly the vehicle for individuals and communities to access news and information and will often be the first source of information. These communication vehicles can also be important routes for getting information from victims and coordinating response activities;

35.   agrees that awareness-raising activities are key to spreading the message amongst local people. It is important to involve all parts of the community, to start as early as possible and to encourage communities to plan for self-help as it often takes a significant time for external assistance to arrive. It is therefore also essential to create specific programmes and plans in

schools on how to prepare for emergencies so that there is an awareness and understanding from an early age which will make the population more resilient;

36.   calls for LRAs to design effective communication channels to reach the most vulnerable in time and put in place mechanisms to bring them to safety during and after extreme weather events and other catastrophes. European societies are growing older and the proportion of the population with reduced mobility or disabilities is rising. In the event of a disaster they are often the most vulnerable and the first casualties;

37.   calls for investment in training and exercising (practising) for disasters as these activities save lives and reduce disruption. Targeted training and education for public safety practitioners, such as those for community leaders, social and medical care practitioners and the rescue and firefighting services, can reduce fatalities during and in the aftermath of the crisis;

C) Recovery

38.   recognises that recovery following a disaster can take many years and that insurance plays an important part in securing timely and effective recovery. Underlines the positive role that public private partnerships can play and calls for their promotion. Private insurance can contribute to sustainable public finances and can play a positive role in disaster risk management. It helps to reduce the economic impact and facilitates recovery. Well-designed insurance policies can also discourage risky behaviour and promote risk awareness. Public private partnerships should have well defined areas and agreed goals;

39.   expresses concern that as a result of increasing risks, insurance might become unavailable or unaffordable in certain areas. This in turn may further contribute to vulnerability and exacerbate the susceptibility of society, leaving public authorities with potentially large financial exposure;

40.   suggests that recovery is an opportunity to incorporate future resilience into the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure, especially in areas which are periodically subject to natural disasters (e.g. riverside towns and villages). Action is needed at Member State level to ensure the availability of funding, which may be through partnerships, not just for recovery work but also for measures providing protection from future disasters;

41.   observes that LRAs have a role during recovery to manage expectations, disappointments and health issues of those affected or displaced by disasters and this has an on-going resource requirement;

International Agenda

42.   urges the Commission to firmly embed resilience-building into its humanitarian aid and development policies;

43.   urges the post-Hyogo Framework to take due account of the link between risk and resilience and human mobility. Notes that disasters often lead to population flows and that this can have a negative systematic consequence on communities of origin and of destination;

44.   recognises that in developing countries, planning frameworks are less-developed and that economic drivers result in great development pressures. Governmental bodies at all levels need to realise that development can increase disaster risks, and where they allow development they must accept a concomitant increase in these risks;

Subsidiarity and proportionality

45.   welcomes that the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality are upheld. Civil protection is an area where the Union acts to support, coordinate or supplement the action of its Member States. Also, the non-binding nature of the communication and principles announced within by the Commission confirm the proportionality.

Brussels, 26 June 2014

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Michel Lebrun

The Secretary-General ad interim
of the Committee of the Regions

Daniel Janssens

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience
Reference(s)	COM(2014) 216
Legal basis	TFEU, art.307(1)
Procedural basis	Optional referral
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	Catherine Day letter of 27 March 2014
Date of Bureau/President's decision	14 April 2014
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Harvey Siggs (UK/ECR)
Analysis	April 2014
Discussed in commission	Scheduled for 5 June 2014
Date adopted by commission	n/a – rapporteur-general procedure
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	n/a – rapporteur-general procedure
Date adopted in plenary	26 June 2014
Previous Committee opinions	CDR 740/2012 on a *Union Civil Protection Mechanism* CdR 15/2011 opinion on *Towards a stronger European disaster response* CdR 139/2009 opinion on *A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters*
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	n/a.

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