

RESOLUTION ON THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL DISASTERS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

With reference to the increasingly frequent, severe and complex natural disasters that have struck numerous European countries in recent years;

With reference to the general trend of increasing losses due to extreme weather events;

Whereas the risk of natural disasters threatens the environment, cultural heritage, European populations and their property, and hampers economic prosperity;

Aware that no European country or region is immune to natural disasters and their consequences, and that the whole of Europe will be faced with worsening consequences of climate change over the coming decades;

Whereas all regions of Europe will be affected by climate change, but to varying degrees;

Aware that natural disasters caused by climate change are increasing the displacement of populations, and that these human movements are diverse and require a range of responses;

Whereas the transnational displacement of populations can lead to conflict and violence;

Whereas environmental degradation adversely affects ecosystems, reducing their ability to prevent, mitigate and protect us from environmental consequences;

Whereas disasters and climate change threaten the poorest populations, who are more exposed to risks because of their geographical location, more vulnerable to the consequences, and lack the means to cope with the damage caused by disasters;

Whereas natural disasters disproportionately affect certain members of society, such as children, women, the elderly, people with disabilities and marginalised groups;

Whereas poor populations suffer in particular from the loss of economic assets such as the destruction of farms and livestock, making them more destitute in the long term and potentially affecting several generations;

Whereas natural disasters affect millions of people and cost the European Union an average of €12 billion a year;

Drawing on the values of solidarity and shared responsibility, which are specific to our continent and fundamental in the event of natural disasters affecting our Member States;

Having regard to the fact that continued development of urban areas increases the risk of natural disasters;

Whereas natural disasters jeopardise various forms of subsistence, such as access to drinking water and food resources;

Whereas natural disasters cause damage to a country's natural resources, such as the destruction of forests or a decline in soil fertility and land productivity;

Taking into account the lasting impact of natural disasters on the poverty of deprived populations and the resultant exacerbation of inequalities;

Whereas meteorological changes and declining land productivity are accelerating the urbanisation process, increasing the cost of living and energy, and exacerbating social and political tensions at national, European and international level;

Having regard to the considerable impact of extreme weather conditions on public health, particularly for vulnerable people;

Whereas urban areas often bear the brunt of damage and loss when a disaster occurs;

Whereas, moreover, the effects of climate change are particularly felt in the southern regions of Europe, which are susceptible to increases in extreme heat, water shortages, drought, forest fires and agricultural losses;

Having regard to the devastating fires that affected the Canary Islands, Sicily and the Alentejo region, among others, in July and August;

Considering the natural disasters that hit the Italian territories, in particular, Emilia Romagna in May 2023 and Tuscany in November 2023;

Whereas the European Union supports disaster risk management through early warning systems, data and scientific knowledge, in addition to its financial support;

Taking into account the importance of improving the resilience of the European Union's infrastructure and economy;

Understanding that sharing knowledge, expertise and best practices is crucial to preventing and responding to crises;

Remaining convinced of the importance of sufficiently understanding the risks of natural disasters so as to be able to manage them effectively and adopt management policies;

The Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies

Stresses the importance of cross-border cooperation on environmental issues, particularly through the exchange of information on disaster risks, in order to strengthen collective resilience;

Stresses the importance of pooling equipment and rescue resources that can be deployed when a country is hit by an unmanageable natural disaster;

Supports the regular reports on the risks of natural disasters prepared by the Commission with a view to understanding these risks;

Points out that prevention and adaptation efforts must be accompanied by investment in environmentally friendly and resilient infrastructures;

Welcomes the European Commission's civil protection initiatives, such as the creation of rescEU, in the fight against natural disasters. Furthermore, evaluate whether and how to make part of the resources immediately available to deal with the emergency. A measure that is ideally similar to the spade that many girls and boys have used in recent hours to shovel mud and debris, a tool of immediate help and support that could also be called "Euro Spade" emergency financing. These

initiatives complement national response resources and support Member States hit by disasters by releasing funds in the event of an emergency;

Encourages Member States to place greater emphasis on prevention, preparedness, resilience and adaptation to disasters, while promoting sustainable development;

Points out that managing the humanitarian consequences of natural disasters and strengthening regional resilience are a priority;

Encourages in this respect any initiative that strengthens resilience and response capacities to climate crises, in particular through investment in disaster prevention and anticipation;

Calls on the European Union to pay particular attention to the specific needs of vulnerable groups when implementing natural disaster resilience initiatives;

Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continually identify and assess the risks of natural disasters, particularly those whose consequences are likely to be cross-border and cross-sectoral, so that this information can be used to strengthen disaster prevention and risk reduction;

Underscores the European Union's efforts to combat climate change, in line with its commitment under the Paris Agreement, by implementing climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to make its societies greener and more resilient, in order to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and avoid the worst natural disasters;

Welcomes the mobilisation of significant financial resources by the European Union to support investment in resilience to natural disasters in Europe (such as the European Structural and Investment Funds), and with this in mind invites the Commission and the member states to take action, strengthening the relationship of proximity, to set up a team of experts who, in concert with the national, regional and local institutions, can facilitate the activation of the immediate emergency grant;

Also welcomes the financial support provided by the European Union to national emergency operations following major disasters (in particular through the European Union Solidarity Fund EUSF, which is hoped to be strengthened and possible increase);

Considering that the procedure for assigning this grant includes a process that can last a few months, evaluate the simplification and timeliness of the methods of disbursement of resources both in the damage assessment, reducing bureaucratic times, both in the procedures and finally in the process of financing also by modifying the process described in the art. 4 of Regulation 2012/2002 of the European Union Solidarity Fund;

Promotes in this respect the strengthening of financial resilience to disasters, given the growing economic cost of natural disasters;

Welcomes the EU funding instruments for research and innovation projects aimed at better preventing, preparing for and responding to natural disasters and their negative consequences;

Stresses the need for the systemic monitoring of natural disaster risks, so as to be able to adapt risk management policies that are dynamic and evolve over time;

Calls on the European Union to take account of the specific situations of its outermost regions, which are exposed to specific disaster risks, making them more vulnerable;

Points out that the protection of people, property, the environment and cultural heritage along with reconstruction following a natural disaster, are first and foremost the responsibility of the national State;

Stresses, however, the importance of European action to complement and support national action;

Reaffirms in this respect the key role played by the European Union in coordinating responses to natural disasters affecting Europe and its regions, all the more so when several States are simultaneously faced with crises, undermining their ability to help each other;

Stresses the importance of rapid reconstruction and recovery following natural disasters in order to avoid prolonged economic hardship for the victims;

Points out that natural disasters are an "opportunity" to build better infrastructures to achieve a high level of protection against them;

Stresses the importance of EU solidarity mechanisms, especially when natural disasters exceed national response capacity and put pressure on national government budgets (as was the case, for example, with Hurricane Lorenzo in the Azores (2019), ~~and~~ the multiple earthquakes that shook central Italy in 2016–2017) and flood events of May 2023 in Emilia Romagna and November 2023 in Tuscany);

Calls on the European Union to pay sufficient attention to the protection of cultural heritage against disasters by stepping up efforts to preserve heritage sites, identifying risks and planning mitigation measures;

Stresses the need for rapid and flexible intervention by the European Union in the event of serious cross-border crises, given the scale of the disruption they can have on our economies and societies;

Invites those Regions and Member States subject to the same types of disasters to cooperate beyond their borders;

Stresses in this respect the key role played by the European Union in strengthening the collective capacity to respond to disasters with cross-border effects, given the interdependence of Member States facing the same emergency and the difficulty for them to help each other;

Underlines the need to strengthen the resilience and protection of critical infrastructures that provide society with vital services (energy, water, food, communications, transport and healthcare), the provision of which may be disrupted by the risk of natural disasters.

Concluded in Brussels, on 1 December 2023