



European Committee
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Commission for
Citizenship, Governance,
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Challenges and opportunities for local authorities in supporting Euro-Mediterranean cooperation

CIVEX



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List of abbreviations

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
APLA	Association of Palestinian Local Authorities
ARLEM	Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly
BBB	Building Back Better
CoR	Committee of the Regions
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GAM	Greater Amman Municipality
LEDs	Light-emitting Diodes
LRAs	Local and Regional Authorities
MCCD	Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue
NbS	Nature-based Solutions
NVV	Nabeul Ville Verte (project)
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SECAP	Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean

Executive summary

This study explores the evolving role of Local and Regional Authorities (LRAs) in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, highlighting their growing contribution to regional development, integration, and resilience. Drawing on extensive case studies, survey data, and field insights, the report examines both the achievements and persistent obstacles faced by LRAs in addressing transnational challenges such as climate change, youth unemployment, migration, and digital transformation, notably through territorial cooperation and dialogue.

Key findings

- LRAs are increasingly acting as engines of innovation, delivering place-based solutions through projects in sustainable energy, urban food systems, the circular economy, and cultural diplomacy. Their proximity to citizens and operational flexibility make them uniquely equipped to address complex regional priorities with practical, locally adapted responses.
- Despite their contributions, LRAs remain underutilised and underfunded. Access to EU funding is hampered by administrative complexity, co-financing requirements, and a lack of technical capacity, especially for smaller municipalities and those in Southern Mediterranean countries. Many operate within centralised systems that limit their legal and institutional capacities.
- Emerging trends point to opportunities for scaling LRA impact through decentralised cooperation, municipal diplomacy, peer learning, and multi-level governance. These approaches demonstrate that LRAs can lead, not just support, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation when given the tools and space to act.
- The EU remains the primary enabler of cross-border cooperation for LRAs. However, reform is needed to simplify procedures, adapt programmes to local realities, and establish technical support structures that empower under-resourced municipalities to engage effectively.

Recommendations

- **For LRAs:** Strengthen internal governance, build international cooperation units, institutionalise participatory models, and proactively lead decentralised partnerships.
- **For national governments:** Reform decentralisation frameworks, create legal and fiscal space for LRAs to lead, and integrate them into national cooperation strategies.

- **For the EU and regional actors:** Embed LRAs in programme design and governance, simplify access to funding, expand peer-learning platforms, and promote territorial approaches in Euro-Mediterranean policy.

Conclusion

LRAs are not merely implementers; they are strategic actors in regional governance. Investing in their capacity, visibility, and voice is essential to achieving a more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

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Introduction

Local and regional authorities (LRAs) are on the front lines of many of the Mediterranean region's most pressing challenges, such as climate change, migration, and economic and social disparities. Yet, their role in shaping Euro-Mediterranean cooperation remains under-recognised and often under-supported. As the region faces a new wave of transformation and its policies are currently being reviewed¹, focusing on the involvement of cities and regions is becoming not only relevant but essential. From implementing policies on the ground to fostering cross-border collaboration, LRAs are uniquely positioned to bring the Euro-Mediterranean vision closer to the realities of people's everyday lives.

Indeed, at the heart of this study is a simple premise: that LRAs, through their local knowledge, practical experience, and close proximity to citizens, have a unique and indispensable role to play in building a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable Mediterranean region. The report explores how this role can be expanded—not only through better access to funding and improved governance frameworks, but also by ensuring that the voices of cities and regions are heard in both regional and global policy arenas.

Ultimately, the findings are intended to support the work of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) in preparing “The Territorial Perspectives for the New Euro-Mediterranean Strategic Agenda”. ARLEM is a unique political forum for regional cooperation at the subnational level, equally gathering 80 elected representatives from cities and regions from the three shores of the Mediterranean Sea. This contribution will help shape ARLEM's role in two major ongoing processes:

1. the reform of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which in 2023 began a critical review of its mandate, effectiveness, and priorities; and
2. the development of a new Pact for the Mediterranean—an effort to build a more coherent and coordinated framework of cooperation between the European Union (EU) and its Southern neighbourhood for addressing shared regional challenges.

¹ During the first semester 2025, the main EU-Southern neighborhood cooperation framework was under review with the development of a New Pact for the Mediterranean, while in parallel the Union for the Mediterranean was undergoing a profound reform; European Commission. (2025). *One sea, three continents: A new Directorate General to strengthen Mediterranean and Gulf partnerships*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_395; Union for the Mediterranean. (2024). *UfM member states gather in Barcelona to discuss the next steps of regional cooperation*. <https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-som-february-2024/>.

To that aim, this study provides evidence-based insights into the contribution of LRAs to Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, based notably on the results of a dedicated survey launched in April 2025. It highlights the main challenges and opportunities they face and explores how their role can be strengthened in the years ahead.

1. Contribution of LRAs to the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework

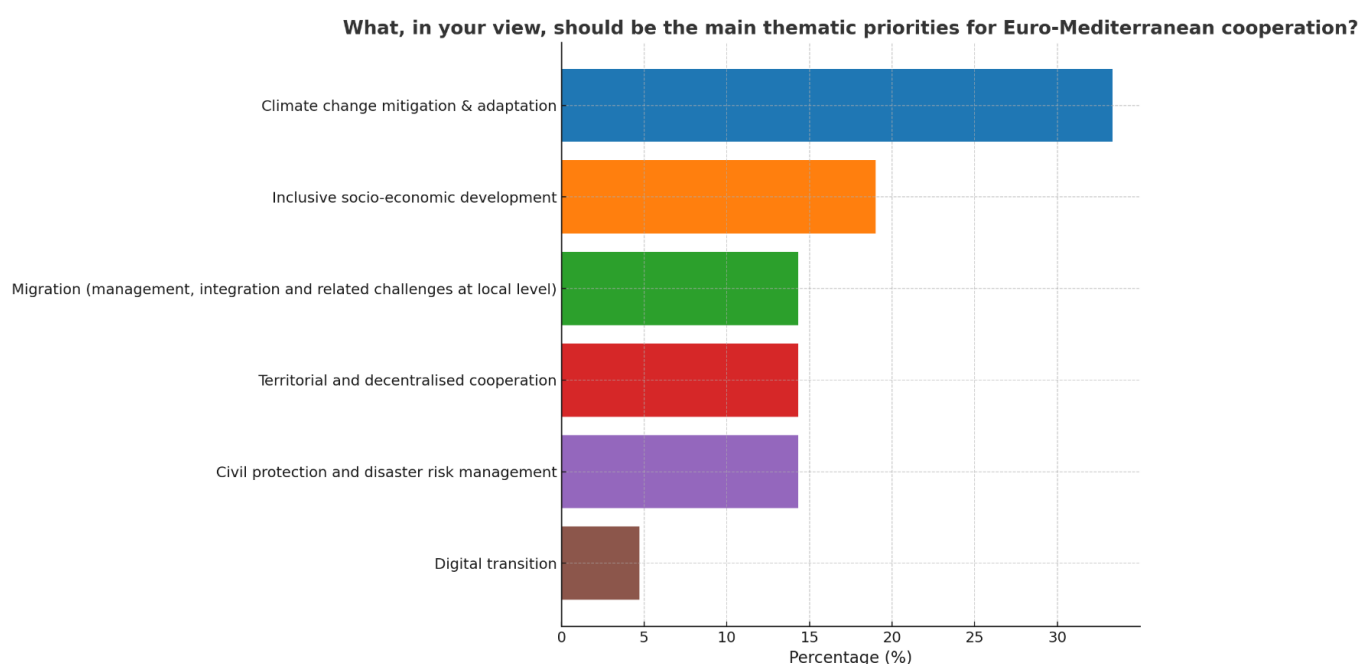
Local and regional authorities (LRAs) are increasingly recognised as key actors in shaping and sustaining Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Their proximity to citizens, cross-sectoral responsibilities, and capacity to implement policies on the ground enable them to contribute meaningfully to regional stability, development, and integration.

This section explores and maps the diverse ways in which LRAs are already contributing to the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation framework, structured around the four main pillars outlined above.

1.1 Local solutions, regional impact: best practices from Euro-Mediterranean LRAs

When consulted, LRAs consistently highlight a number of key challenges they face across the region:

Results compiled by the authors based on the survey² results



² A questionnaire was launched to identified LRAs to prepare this study. See annex for more information.

a. Climate change

Among the respondents, a third stressed that **climate change mitigation and adaptation are now the principal preoccupations of their mandates**. This reflects a growing recognition of the urgent need in the region to address the climate and environmental emergency the Euro-Mediterranean Basin faces. Many LRAs are shifting resources and priorities towards resilient infrastructure, sustainable energy, and ecosystem-based approaches, acknowledging that their communities are on the front lines of climate impacts.

The following examples illustrate how such efforts are already making a difference, offering inspiration and practical insights for others across the region.

Box 1. Case Study: SECAP implementation in Al-Karak, Jordan

In the southern Jordanian city of Al-Karak, rapid population growth has strained infrastructure and driven up energy consumption, with the municipality spending nearly EUR 2.5 million annually—up to 15% of its overall budget—on energy alone. To address this unsustainable trend, Karak adopted a Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)³ in 2016 under the EU-funded CES-MED project, aiming to support LRAs to mitigate climate impacts through renewable energy, efficiency upgrades, and infrastructure improvements.⁴

With a clear target of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030, Karak began by identifying its most energy-intensive sectors through comprehensive audits. The city moved swiftly to implement change: it refurbished public buildings to meet green standards, replaced traditional streetlights with energy-efficient Light-emitting Diodes (LEDs), and launched a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) to build a 3 MWp solar power plant. This plant now provides 55% of Karak's electricity needs and is expected to generate savings of over EUR 22 million across three decades.

The municipality also introduced hybrid and electric vehicles into its fleet and installed three public charging stations to support the transition. Recognising that long-term change requires skilled personnel, Karak partnered with Mutah University to establish a training centre focused on renewable energy and climate action, ensuring the availability of local expertise for years to come.

³ Municipality of Karak. (2016). *Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP)*. CES-MED Project. [https://www.climamed.eu/wp-content/uploads/files/Jordan-Municipality-of-Karak-Sustainable-Energy-and-Climate-Action-Plan-\(SECAP\).pdf](https://www.climamed.eu/wp-content/uploads/files/Jordan-Municipality-of-Karak-Sustainable-Energy-and-Climate-Action-Plan-(SECAP).pdf).

⁴ European Union Neighbourhood South. (n.d.). CES-MED: Cleaner Energy Saving Mediterranean Cities. <https://south.euneighbours.eu/project/ces-med-cleaner-energy-saving-mediterranean-cities/>.

Beyond energy, Karak also addressed environmental sustainability through its participation in the MINARET II project, which applied a water-energy-food nexus approach. A solar-powered plant nursery was created to reduce erosion, reintroduce native plant species, and provide employment opportunities.

Karak's experience shows that even smaller municipalities can become engines of green transformation when backed by political will, inclusive partnerships, and a focus on both infrastructure and human capacity. The city's approach not only reduced emissions but also fostered economic resilience and community engagement.

Box 2. Case Study: Flood protection endeavours in Nabeul, Tunisia

Nabeul, a coastal city in northeastern Tunisia, became increasingly vulnerable to seasonal flooding, especially during more frequent and intense heavy storms that caused nearby rivers to overflow.⁵ The devastating floods of September 2018, which caused damage estimated at over EUR 157 million,⁶ exposed the city's fragile infrastructure and the risks linked to unchecked urbanisation and environmental degradation. As one of Tunisia's top tourist destinations, Nabeul faces the dual challenge of protecting both its population and its economy from future climate-related disasters.

In response, the city launched the "Nabeul Ville Verte" (NVV) project with support from national institutions and EU co-financing under the C4C programme.⁷ The project introduced a range of measures to strengthen climate resilience, including rerouting flood-prone rivers, restoring ecosystems through hillside reforestation, and upgrading urban drainage systems to better absorb stormwater. These technical efforts were matched by community-focused actions, such as public awareness campaigns on climate adaptation and training for local financial institutions to help them better support green projects.⁸

The 2018 disaster became a turning point for Nabeul, prompting a shift towards the "Building Back Better" approach, where recovery efforts prioritise long-term resilience rather than simply rebuilding what was lost. By integrating Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and mobilising diverse funding, including EU

⁵ Dhaouadi, S., Kefi, M., Tarkhani, W., Stambouli, T., & Chkirbene, A. (2020). *Assessment of the impact of land-cover change on water quality: Case study of the Chiba watershed, Nabeul, Tunisia*. Euro-Mediterranean Journal for Environmental Integration, 5(1), 57. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41207-020-00195-7>.

⁶ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2023). *The Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030* (p. 2). <https://sendaiframework-mtr.undrr.org/media/84416/download?startDownload=20250401>.

⁷ Clima-Med. (n.d.). Climate for Cities (C4C) Programme. <https://www.climamed.eu/c4c>.

⁸ Global Alliance for Buildings and Construction. (n.d.). *Initiative Notice: Commune of Nabeul – Flood resilience*. <https://globalabc.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/GABC%20-%20Initiative%20Notice%20-%20Commune%20of%20Nabeul%20-%20Flood%20resilience.pdf>.

support and local financing tools, Nabeul has become an example for other cities facing similar climate pressures.⁹

Nabeul's example highlights how cities can turn climate disasters into opportunities for long-term resilience by combining infrastructure upgrades, NbS, and community engagement within a strategic recovery framework.

A final notable experience is the **Amman–Milan city-to-city cooperation** to strengthen urban agrifood systems.

Box 3. Case Study: Amman–Milan Partnership: Advancing urban food systems through peer learning

Amman, like many rapidly expanding cities, faces significant challenges related to food security, waste management, and sustainable consumption. Food loss and waste, particularly at the retail and household levels, contribute to environmental and socio-economic problems, but municipalities often lack the tools to address these issues effectively.

To tackle these challenges, Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) partnered with the Municipality of Milan through **a peer-to-peer cooperation framework under the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact**. The collaboration was designed to facilitate knowledge exchange and joint learning around sustainable food systems, with a specific focus on reducing food loss and waste. As part of the initiative, the cities co-organised the international workshop “Together in Action” in December 2024, hosted in Amman, with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). The workshop brought together around 90 participants, including municipal teams, civil society organisations, and international experts such as FAO, Greater Amman Municipality, Milan Municipality, Let's Food, and others.¹⁰

Amman drew directly from Milan's experience in implementing integrated food policies, piloting awareness-raising campaigns and initiating the mapping of food waste hotspots. The workshop facilitated peer-to-peer learning and laid the groundwork for building a community of practice, indicating that awareness and capacity-building were central to the initiative. GAM developed a food waste action plan based on a participatory food loss and waste assessment, conducted

⁹ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. (2023). *The Midterm Review of the Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*. <https://sendaiframework-mtr.undrr.org/media/84416/download?startDownload=20250401>.

¹⁰ Milan Urban Food Policy Pact. (2024). *International workshop: Together in Action on Food Losses and Waste at City Level*. <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/international-workshop-together-in-action-on-food-losses-and-waste-at-city-level/>.

with technical support from Let's Food and informed by city-to-city learning with Milan.

Municipal staff from both cities also participated in immersive field visits and joint technical sessions. Around 30–40 municipal staff were actively involved in joint technical working groups, interactive exercises on city needs assessments, and sessions on assessment and planning for a food waste strategy.

The overall approach—leveraging participatory assessments, international peer learning, and local action planning—represents a solid model for urban food systems transformation.

This collaboration was further supported by a study tour to Milan and Rome in February 2024, focused on improving Jordan's national agrilogistics system for the horticulture value chain. The engagement of public and private Jordanian stakeholders, along with national ministry support, underscored the institutional commitment to advancing this agenda.

This partnership marks a first-of-its-kind collaboration on urban food systems in the region and represents a step forward in Amman's ambition to localise sustainable development goals. The collaboration highlights how city-to-city cooperation from across the Mediterranean can serve as a powerful lever for policy innovation, allowing municipalities to adapt proven practices to their own context. Moreover, peer exchange fosters institutional learning and builds municipal capacity in tackling cross-cutting issues.

b. Inclusive socio-economic development

Following the climate crisis, the second main challenge raised by LRAs as a top priority is **inclusive socio-economic development**, including skills and quality education, entrepreneurship, and youth and women's economic empowerment.

The experience of a Lebanese municipality showcases the enormous potential LRAs can play in these sectors:

Box 4. Case Study: Circular economy and youth empowerment in Zgharta-Ehden, Lebanon

Zgharta-Ehden, a municipality in northern Lebanon, like many other cities across the region, has faced **rising youth unemployment** and **underused economic potential** in recent years, particularly in cultural and productive sectors. **Limited opportunities for women and young people** highlighted the need for an **inclusive, locally driven response**.

Within the framework of the **LASERMED project**¹¹ led by MedCities (2021–2023), the municipality launched a **pilot initiative** to foster **local economic resilience** by promoting **circular economy entrepreneurship**. Following a **participatory diagnosis**, the municipality decided to focus on **revitalising the olive oil soap and textile upcycling sectors**—areas with both cultural roots and market potential in the area. Over **30 beneficiaries**, primarily unemployed women and youth, received **business and marketing training**, while others developed skills in **audiovisual production**, linking creative capacity with economic opportunity. These efforts led to the **creation of three new enterprises** driven by project participants, marking a **tangible shift towards self-employment and local value generation**.¹²

A central outcome of the initiative was the **establishment of ZE.dynamo**, a **municipal innovation hub** conceived to incubate emerging projects and anchor long-term local development. Beyond its economic impacts, the process **reinforced public trust in local governance**, **encouraged civic participation**, and **strengthened the municipality's ability to conduct territorial diagnostics** and respond to the needs of vulnerable groups.

Zgharta-Ehden's success story demonstrates that **local governments are uniquely positioned** to take a more active role in designing and implementing policies that respond to **territorial economic challenges** and stimulate economic activity within their communities. Their ability to **coordinate stakeholders**, **mobilise resources**, and **establish support mechanisms** makes them a **powerful lever** for fostering **economic growth and enhancing social inclusion**.

¹¹ MedCities. (2023). *LASERMED: Local action for the socioeconomic recovery in the Mediterranean: the cities respond*. <https://medcities.org/project/lasermед/>.

¹² Elouardani, K. (2023, June). *Évaluation et capitalisation du projet LASERMED: Synthèse de capitalisation*. MedCities. <https://medcities.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/2.1.2.-A-Rapport-de-capitalisation.pdf>.

It is also worth noting the **ARLEM Award – Young Local Entrepreneurship in the Mediterranean**¹³, now in its **seventh edition**, which each year rewards both young entrepreneurs (under 35) and the local authority that has supported their business ideas. It highlights how LRAs can create conducive environments for businesses to flourish, and how the economic activity of entrepreneurial young minds can improve the welfare of the whole community, by positively impacting job prospects and also often far beyond.

c. Migration

In addition to these two prominent challenges, a series of key priorities emerge where the role of LRAs is increasingly strengthening.

A pivotal area remains **migration**, where local and regional authorities are at the **frontline of both immediate response and long-term integration**. As the **first institutional point of contact** for many newcomers, LRAs play a **critical role** in ensuring access to **basic services** such as housing, education, and healthcare, while also **fostering social cohesion** through community-based initiatives. Their **proximity to local populations** enables them to design and implement **tailored integration strategies** that respond to specific territorial needs and opportunities. Beyond service provision, LRAs also contribute to **shaping inclusive narratives around migration, countering misinformation, and encouraging intercultural dialogue**. In the Euro-Mediterranean region, several municipalities have taken **proactive steps to link migration management with local development, turning demographic challenges into opportunities for revitalisation and economic diversification**.

Box 5. Case Study: Promoting awareness of the risks of irregular migration in l'Oriental, Morocco

In recent years, the city of Oujda in the Oriental region has become a **key entry point for irregular migrants**. This **growing migratory pressure** has highlighted the **need for locally driven, preventive strategies** that address the **root causes of migration** and offer **viable alternatives to young people**.

The project, implemented by the **Catalan regional government (Spain), Skåne County (Sweden), nine Catalan municipalities, and the Oriental region**, among others, under the **Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund**

¹³ [ARLEM Award | European Committee of the Regions](#)

(AMIF – 2014–2020),¹⁴ aimed at fostering a **more coordinated and solidarity-based approach to managing migration**. It focused on **strengthening the capacities of local and regional authorities** of the Oriental region, as well as **civil society organisations**, to **raise awareness about the risks of irregular migration, legal alternatives, and available professional opportunities within the region**.

Key actions included a **regional study on youth motivations for migration** and the **development of awareness-raising campaigns**,¹⁵ and the **creation of a youth-focused toolkit** and a **mobile app providing access to local job and training opportunities**. The project also produced **documentary workshops showcasing the experiences of the Moroccan diaspora and unaccompanied minors in Catalonia**. Additionally, **capacity-building sessions were held for stakeholders** to improve their ability to **guide young people towards legal migration options**.¹⁶ **Over 1,500 Moroccan students from 30 schools received education on the risks of irregular immigration, as well as the importance of vocational training programmes and job opportunities in the Oriental Region.**¹⁷

The project **underscored the pivotal role that local and regional authorities play in managing migration and integration policies**. Their proximity to the population positions them uniquely to implement effective awareness-raising strategies and provide tailored support to young people considering migration. Training sessions and the development of informational toolkits enhanced the abilities of local and regional authorities to provide accurate information and support to young people. This empowerment is vital for sustaining long-term, community-based migration management strategies.

Nevertheless, this expanding role of LRAs **calls for enhanced multi-level governance, adequate financial and technical support**, and mechanisms to share good practices and scale up successful models across the region.

14 Generalitat de Catalunya. (2023). *Cloenda del projecte europeu Shababuna al Marroc*. Departament d'Acció Exterior i Unió Europea. https://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/mediterrania/shababuna/20230701-cloenda.

15 Generalitat de Catalunya. (n.d.). *Recursos del projecte Shababuna*. Departament d'Acció Exterior i Unió Europea. https://exteriors.gencat.cat/ca/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/mediterrania/shababuna/recursos/.

16 Generalitat de Catalunya. (n.d.). *Objectius del projecte Shababuna*. Departament d'Acció Exterior i Unió Europea. https://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/mediterrania/shababuna/objectius/.

17 Generalitat de Catalunya. (2023). *Cloenda del projecte europeu Shababuna al Marroc*. Departament d'Acció Exterior i Unió Europea. https://exteriors.gencat.cat/en/ambits-dactuacio/afers_exteriors/mediterrania/shababuna/20230701-cloenda.

d. Civil protection

Another area where the role of LRAs is growing significantly is **civil protection**. As climate-related and man-made disasters across the Euro-Mediterranean area increase in frequency and intensity, **local and regional authorities have become essential actors in the full disaster risk management cycle**—from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery.

LRAs are uniquely positioned to assess local vulnerabilities, mobilise communities, and coordinate immediate emergency responses. Their proximity allows for rapid mobilisation of resources, targeted communication, and more effective coordination with civil society organisations, emergency services, and national authorities. **In many regions, they have taken the lead in developing early warning systems, community-based preparedness programmes, and contingency plans adapted to local risks.**

Moreover, **LRAs play a crucial role in fostering a culture of risk awareness and continuous learning**. By institutionalising post-disaster evaluations and promoting inter-agency collaboration, they enhance both readiness and resilience. As demonstrated by the case of Aude, France, mutual trust among agencies, continuity of technical expertise, and the ability to adapt national frameworks to local realities are key to effective civil protection governance.

Box 6. Case Study: Risk culture and civil protection in Aude, France¹⁸

Located in southern France, the Department of Aude has become a **leading model in civil protection through its proactive approach to risk and disaster management**. Following repeated floods, forest fires, and a terrorist attack, the provincial council committed to enhancing local resilience by embedding risk reduction into public governance.

Aude established specialised agencies like the Syndicat Mixte des Milieux Aquatiques et des Rivières (SMMAR) to assess and mitigate flood risks, as well as to **promote a cross-sectoral culture of risk awareness**. Despite high staff turnover due to short regional mandates (averaging two years), Aude successfully cultivated **continuity through a pool of highly trained local experts with deep regional knowledge**.

18 Viola, R. (2023). *The role of local and regional authorities in civil protection: Own-initiative opinion*. European Committee of the Regions. https://cepli.eu/wp-content/uploads/viola_civil_protection_cor-2023-01575-00-02-tcd-tra-en.pdf.

The department's strength lies in **institutionalising learning**. After each disaster, a systematic review process helps strengthen response capabilities and refine future planning. Aude also benefits from **high levels of inter-agency trust**, allowing for effective coordination during crises—even in the absence of rigid protocols.

Aude's civil protection system spans the full Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) cycle—from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery. Its integrated approach, built on mutual trust, clear mandates, and sustained technical expertise, provides valuable lessons for other ARLEM LRAs:

- 1. Learning from disaster must become institutional:** Lessons from past events are easily accessible and yield high returns.
- 2. Inter-agency collaboration begins with dialogue:** Cooperation starts small and scales with trust and shared purpose.
- 3. Trust replaces paperwork:** Strong working relationships can enable efficient operations, even in the absence of detailed procedures.

While not without challenges, particularly in resource distribution and staff continuity, **Aude exemplifies how a localised, well-coordinated, and adaptive model can enhance civil protection across multiple risk domains.**

Strengthening LRAs' capacity in civil protection requires more than just emergency funding. It calls for integrated risk governance frameworks, sustained investment in training and infrastructure, and the inclusion of LRAs in national and regional disaster planning mechanisms. Sharing good practices across borders—particularly in the Euro-Mediterranean context—can accelerate learning and equip municipalities with tested strategies to respond to evolving threats.

e. Digitalisation

Digitalisation is another strategic domain where the role of LRAs is rapidly expanding. As digital technologies transform public service delivery, economic development, and citizen engagement, local and regional authorities are becoming central actors in shaping inclusive and smart digital transitions.

By investing in digital infrastructure, LRAs can **bridge the urban-rural divide and ensure equitable access to digital services.** Many municipalities are leading the way in deploying e-government platforms, digitising administrative processes, and offering online services that make governance more transparent, efficient, and

user-friendly. These efforts not only reduce bureaucratic burdens but also enhance citizen trust and participation.

At the local level, **digitalisation also supports economic innovation** by enabling small businesses and entrepreneurs to access new markets and tools. LRAs play a critical role in fostering local digital ecosystems—supporting startups, promoting digital literacy, and collaborating with universities and private actors to cultivate a skilled workforce.

In the Euro-Mediterranean region, **several LRAs have developed smart city initiatives and piloted digital solutions** in sectors such as mobility, energy, and waste management. These efforts help improve urban planning and resource management, while making cities more liveable and sustainable.

Box 7. Case study: Algiers Smart City 2035, Algeria

Algiers, the capital of Algeria, has long struggled with urban congestion, inefficient services, and economic overreliance on oil. In the wake of the 2014 oil crisis, the need for economic diversification and urban reform became urgent.¹⁹ In response, the Wilaya (province) of Algiers launched *Smart City 2035*, a locally led digital strategy to modernise infrastructure, improve quality of life, and position Algiers as an inclusive, innovative, and resilient city.²⁰

Introduced in 2017, the initiative aims to improve public services, expand digital infrastructure, and promote sustainable urban planning. Early actions included investing in fibre-optic infrastructure and supporting Algeria's first telecom satellite, enabling citywide connectivity. The local government also created FabLabs to support low-cost innovation in areas like mobility and public services. The FabLabs have provided platforms for prototyping and collaboration, supporting the development of smart solutions in mobility,

19 Oxford Business Group. (2018). *A smarter blueprint: Paving the way for widespread technological development in other cities in the emerging world*. <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/algeria/2018-report/economy/a-smarter-blueprint-paving-the-way-for-widespread-technological-development-in-other-cities-in-the-emerging-world>.

20 Oxford Business Group. (2018). *Algiers Smart City: Practical & pragmatic*. https://frankcraval.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/OBG_Alger-Smart-City-Booklet_English.pdf.

environment, and public services through the involvement of over 300 Algerian start-ups.²¹ This is central to the Wilaya’s “talent leverage model”.²²

Uniquely, the project is primarily locally funded, combining municipal and national resources with public-private partnerships and in-kind support from universities and start-up hubs.²³

The Algiers Smart City initiative demonstrates that digital transformation can be successfully led at the municipal level, even with limited resources, when there is clear vision and strategic coordination. By piloting low-cost, high-impact projects like FabLabs and open-source platforms, Algiers created momentum, built local capacity, and attracted external interest (e.g. presentations in international fora) without large initial investments.

By investing in local talent and focusing on open, collaborative innovation, smart/digital city strategies become more inclusive, adaptable, and sustainable. It is a model that could easily be applied to other cities in the region.

f. Culture

Culture is an increasingly important domain where LRAs are demonstrating leadership, using cultural policy as a tool for social cohesion, economic development, and regional identity-building. At the local level, culture is not only a matter of heritage preservation but also a powerful driver of community resilience and inclusive development.

Local and regional authorities are uniquely placed to promote cultural diversity and foster intercultural dialogue. By managing cultural spaces, funding grassroots initiatives, and facilitating access to cultural activities, LRAs create platforms where communities can express their identities, bridge divides, and build mutual understanding, particularly in diverse and multi-ethnic territories.

21 Algérie Presse Service. (2021). *Over 300 startups contribute to Algiers Smart City project*. <https://www.aps.dz/en/health-science-technology/27257-over-300-startups-contribute-to-algiers-smart-city-project>.

22 Oxford Business Group. (2018). *A smarter blueprint: Paving the way for widespread technological development in other cities in the emerging world*. <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/algeria/2018-report/economy/a-smarter-blueprint-paving-the-way-for-widespread-technological-development-in-other-cities-in-the-emerging-world>.

23 Ibidem.

In the Euro-Mediterranean region, **LRAs have leveraged cultural heritage and creativity to revitalise urban spaces and stimulate local economies.** Festivals, exhibitions, and public art projects have become tools for urban regeneration and community engagement. In rural and peripheral areas, culture also plays a vital role in preventing depopulation by strengthening local pride and creating new employment opportunities.

A notable example of city-to-city collaboration is the ties created under the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue (MCCD) initiative.

Box 8. Case Study: Fostering intercultural dialogue through the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture

Although only recently launched by the UfM and the Anna Lindh Foundation, and supported by ARLEM, **this initiative presents strong development potential**, building on the successful regional example of the European Capitals of Culture. The MCCD designates one northern and one southern Mediterranean city each year to work on a collaborative year-long programme of cultural and educational activities aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

Tirana, Albania, and Alexandria, Egypt were selected as the first-ever MCCDs, followed by Matera, Italy, and Tetouan, Morocco. These municipalities are currently actively involved in jointly organising and implementing a diverse array of events, including art festivals, cultural fairs, conferences, and youth workshops. These activities are designed to highlight each city's unique Mediterranean heritage while promoting shared values of tolerance and respect across the region.

This partnership exemplifies how municipalities can play a pivotal role in cultural diplomacy, leveraging their local assets to contribute to broader regional cooperation and understanding. Based on the successful results of the more established European Capitals of Culture initiative, the role of LRAs when investing in culture can be a powerful catalyst for urban regeneration, social cohesion, and international visibility.

Cities that have held the title of European Capital of Culture report increased tourism, revitalised public spaces, and stronger cultural infrastructures. One of the most significant learnings is the importance of inclusive cultural programming that engages local communities, not just as spectators but as active participants, helping to foster a sense of pride and

belonging. The initiative has also shown that culture can drive cross-sector collaboration, stimulate creative economies, and build lasting networks across Europe and beyond.

Cultural cooperation allows LRAs to connect across borders, reinforcing shared Mediterranean identities and promoting peace and mutual respect. Initiatives like twinning programmes, joint heritage projects, and intercultural networks show the potential of decentralised cultural diplomacy to build bridges where formal diplomacy may struggle.

All case studies presented above clearly underscore the indispensable role of LRAs in shaping and delivering responses to complex, cross-border challenges across the Euro-Mediterranean area. From tackling climate risks and youth unemployment to addressing the root causes of irregular migration and driving digital transformation, LRAs are not merely frontline implementers—they are also **key drivers of innovation**, capable of crafting context-specific, inclusive, and high-impact solutions. However, their ability to fully realise this potential is often hindered by **persistent structural, institutional, and financial constraints** that limit their influence and operational capacity within broader governance frameworks.

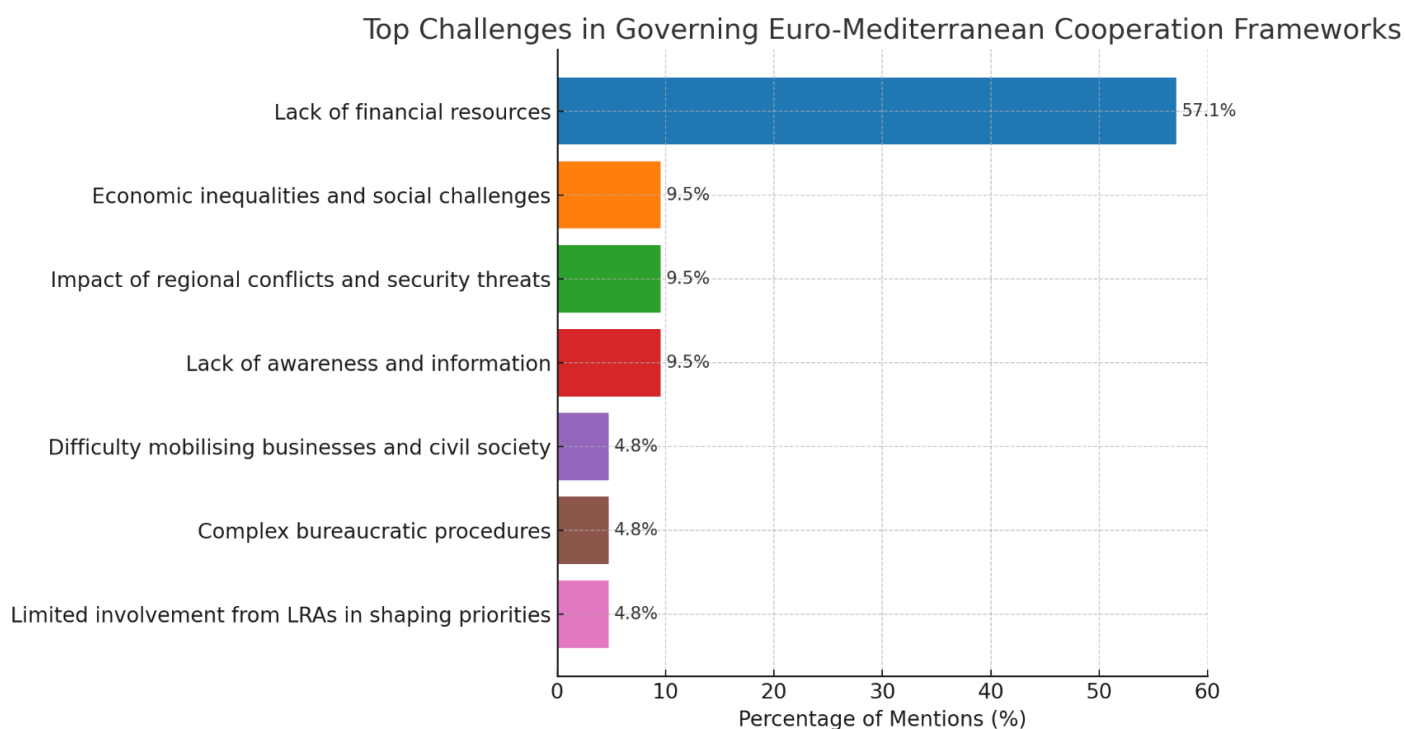
1.2 Translating local action into policy insight: lessons learned from Euro-Mediterranean LRAs engagement

The case studies across the Euro-Mediterranean region reveal recurring challenges that hinder the full potential of LRAs in contributing more meaningfully to regional cooperation and development. Despite their proximity to citizens, strong contextual knowledge, and operational agility, LRAs often remain underutilised and undervalued within broader policy and cooperation frameworks. This persistent gap between local potential and regional implementation reflects both structural limitations and missed opportunities within the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

a. Challenges

A prominent and consistent challenge is the limited access of LRAs to funding mechanisms. While financial instruments such as AMIF, Horizon Europe, NDICI – Global Europe, and others provide significant resources for addressing shared challenges, many LRAs—particularly in southern Mediterranean countries—lack the technical, institutional, and administrative capacity to successfully navigate these programmes.

Applying for these funds often involves complex procedures, advanced project design, long-term financial planning, and reporting systems that many municipalities are not equipped to handle. This issue is further exacerbated by a general lack of awareness about available opportunities, insufficient dissemination of information in local languages, and the absence of intermediary support structures that could help LRAs translate their needs into fundable proposals.



Results compiled by the authors based on the survey²⁴ results

Moreover, even when funding is theoretically accessible, many instruments do not adequately reflect the specific realities and constraints of LRAs. Co-financing requirements, for instance, can be prohibitive for smaller or financially fragile municipalities. In addition, the absence of dedicated technical assistance for pre-accession and southern neighbourhood partners means that those LRAs most in need of support are often the least able to benefit. Over time, this gap risks reinforcing territorial inequalities and leaving local actors ill-equipped to address growing transnational challenges.

Despite these challenges, the EU remains the primary and most reliable source of funding for LRAs engaged in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Although access, capacity, and procedural complexity present significant barriers, EU funding continues to enable cross-border initiatives that address shared regional priorities.

This is evident in the majority of successful best practices highlighted earlier in the report, nearly all of which were made possible through EU support—via bilateral cooperation instruments, thematic programmes such as ENI CBC MED, or broader frameworks like Horizon Europe, Interreg MED, and the Urban

²⁴ see Annex

Agenda. These mechanisms have allowed LRAs to pilot innovations, build capacity, and scale local actions to regional impact.

The EU's contribution is not only financial but also strategic. Its frameworks offer structured spaces for cooperation, knowledge exchange, and policy alignment—spaces that many LRAs could not access through national channels alone. This reinforces the need to maintain and enhance EU support mechanisms tailored to local realities, while improving access for underrepresented municipalities. **Improving the usability, visibility, and inclusiveness of EU funding tools is essential** to empower LRAs in shaping the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

A second persistent obstacle lies in fragmented governance frameworks across the Euro-Mediterranean region. In many countries, especially in the southern and eastern Mediterranean, LRAs function within highly centralised systems. National governments retain control over strategic planning and international cooperation, limiting LRA involvement in EU-supported reform agendas. This exclusion reduces the effectiveness of multi-level governance and often disconnects regional strategies from local needs.

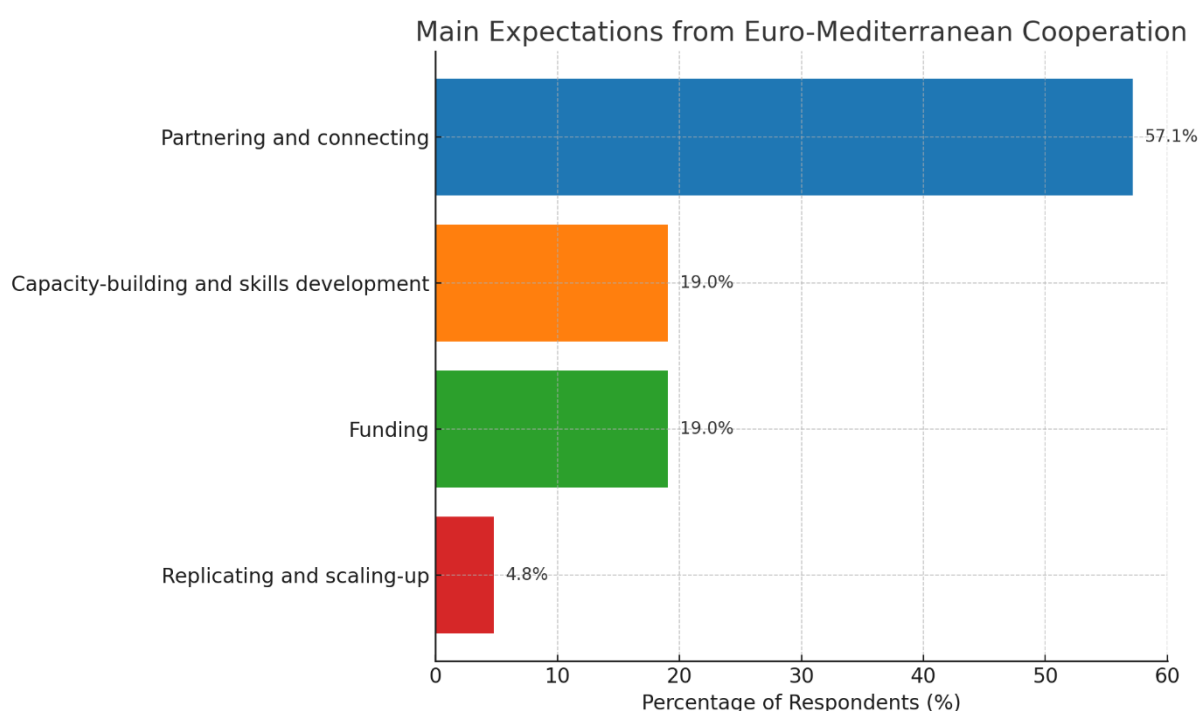
This marginalisation is especially visible in the bilateral components of the ENP, where state-to-state diplomacy dominates, and decentralisation reforms remain incomplete or uneven. The absence of institutionalised LRA participation and weak intergovernmental coordination mean that even aligned local initiatives often go unrecognised and unsupported. This undermines LRAs' potential as strategic partners in addressing regional challenges such as migration and climate change.

Looking ahead, the Euro-Mediterranean region faces a convergence of complex and accelerating challenges. Environmental degradation, youth migration, digital transformation, and socio-economic volatility are no longer distant risks—they are current realities disproportionately affecting cities and regions. Centralised, one-size-fits-all approaches will not suffice. **Without meaningful LRA involvement, regional responses risk overlooking both the root causes of vulnerability and the innovative potential of subnational actors.**

b. Opportunities and potential areas of development

Despite these constraints, **the case studies reviewed highlight promising practices and emerging opportunities that can serve as models for broader adoption.** One of the most encouraging trends is the rise of decentralised cooperation and peer-to-peer exchanges. Initiatives such as the trilateral collaboration between Catalonia (Spain), Skåne (Sweden), and the Oriental Region of Morocco, or the Milan–Amman partnership on food systems, demonstrate that LRAs can effectively engage across borders—sharing solutions, pooling expertise, and jointly developing approaches that are both context-sensitive and scalable. These forms of horizontal cooperation often succeed where formal frameworks fall short, precisely because they are grounded in mutual trust, shared challenges, and practical outcomes.

This is echoed in the survey conducted as part of this study, where **the majority of respondents identified partnering and connecting as their main expectation** from Euro-Mediterranean cooperation.



Results compiled by the authors based on the survey²⁵ results

²⁵ see Annex

Case studies such as the SECAP implementation in Karak, Jordan, and the LASERMED project in Zgharta-Ehden, Lebanon, show that **smaller municipalities can act as regional leaders** in climate action, food security, and local economic development when provided with the right resources, strong partnerships, and political backing. These examples demonstrate that impact is not determined by size or administrative tier, but by **institutional commitment, stakeholder engagement, and policy innovation**.

Importantly, these case studies reveal that **investing in LRAs is not only a local development strategy—it is a regional integration strategy**. Local actors are often first to respond to global pressures, such as migration, climate shocks, or digital change. By more fully integrating LRAs into regional and international policy processes, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation can become more **inclusive, responsive, and sustainable**. LRAs are vital for localising global frameworks such as the SDGs, the EU Green Deal, the Global Gateway, and the Urban Agenda for the EU.

These insights from local experience highlight both existing gaps and actionable opportunities to strengthen the role of LRAs in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Building on these lessons, the next section outlines targeted recommendations to unlock the full potential of LRAs by **strengthening capacities, improving multilevel coordination**, and ensuring **meaningful involvement in shaping regional policies** that reflect the complexity and diversity of the Euro-Mediterranean space.

2. Recommendations for LRAs in Supporting Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation

This section presents a structured set of recommendations aimed at reinforcing the role of LRAs in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Drawing on the analysis conducted in Part 1, the recommendations are based on desk research, case studies, and findings from the EU Survey launched in March 2025. They respond to the specific needs of LRAs, particularly in Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs), and reflect the realities of operating within a complex, multi-level governance environment.

The recommendations are organised by level of governance—local and regional, national, and EU—recognising that effective cooperation requires complementary action across all tiers. At the centre of this framework are LRAs: as first responders to many of the region’s challenges, they require the capacity, autonomy, and institutional recognition to act meaningfully in cross-border and regional cooperation. While each governance level has distinct responsibilities, the recommendations highlight how national governments and EU/regional institutions can **support, enable, and scale LRA-led solutions**, particularly across the four thematic pillars:

- Addressing common challenges;
- Advancing territorial solutions;
- Expanding matchmaking opportunities; and
- Improving access to funding mechanisms.

This governance-level approach aims to ensure that LRAs are not isolated implementers, but fully integrated actors in shaping the Euro-Mediterranean agenda—supported by coherent, responsive, and well-coordinated frameworks at all levels.

2.1 Recommendations for LRAs

To respond meaningfully to multifaceted challenges, LRAs across the Euro-Mediterranean region must **strengthen their internal governance systems and position themselves as strategic actors within broader cooperation frameworks**. As the survey conducted for this study showed, LRAs are ready to do more, but need the tools, networks, and recognition to act at scale. A bottom-up approach and coherent set of responses is therefore needed at the local and regional level, starting with practical steps that align local governance with regional ambition.

- **LRAs should prioritise the development of dedicated internal structures for managing international cooperation and funding engagement.**

While some cities, such as Bursa and Palermo, have established units capable of planning, implementing, and managing EU-funded initiatives, most municipalities in the region still rely on under-resourced, ad hoc arrangements. Creating specialised cooperation teams with expertise in project design, partner coordination, and external communication can enable consistent participation in Euro-Mediterranean programmes and reduce dependence on external consultants. This also builds institutional memory and supports long-term planning.

- **LRAs should institutionalise participatory and inclusive governance models.**

Survey responses revealed widespread difficulties in mobilising civil society, youth, and the private sector, despite strong public interest in themes like digitalisation, environmental justice, and mobility. Initiatives such as Monastir's community-driven climate resilience efforts and Zgharta-Ehden's innovation hub show the value of structured civic engagement. Tools such as participatory budgeting, public consultations, and youth innovation labs can ensure regional cooperation efforts are grounded in local realities and values.

- **LRAs must invest in their communities through applied and continuous training.**

LRA staff across the region highlighted the need for practical training—not only in project management but also in adaptive governance, stakeholder engagement, NbS, and financial innovation. Karak's municipal training centre for energy transition exemplifies how even smaller municipalities can lead with targeted support. Partnering with national academies, EU

programmes, PPPs, and decentralised cooperation networks can establish localised professional development pipelines.

- **LRAs should engage in transnational cooperation as equal peers, not just recipients.**

Many partner country municipalities see themselves as junior partners in EU-funded projects. However, examples like Radovich's energy transition strategy and APLA's work in climate and waste planning demonstrate the replicable, high-impact solutions already emerging locally. Municipalities should take the lead in documenting and sharing their experiences through regional portals, thematic networks, and open-data platforms. A Mediterranean LRA Cooperation Portal could significantly enhance visibility and facilitate strategic alliances.

- **LRAs should advocate more assertively for inclusion in Euro-Mediterranean policy dialogues.**

While strategic frameworks such as the UfM acknowledge cities and regions, they rarely institutionalise their participation. National associations, cross-border alliances, and platforms such as ARLEM provide avenues to push for a more formalised role—for instance, via permanent LRA advisory councils or thematic consultations embedded within regional governance processes. Institutionalising LRA participation would make the Euro-Mediterranean partnership more responsive, resilient, and inclusive.

- **LRAs should expand their financial strategies and reduce dependency on narrow grant schemes.**

Funding barriers, such as co-financing requirements and complex procedures, remain among the most cited obstacles. While higher-level reforms are needed, LRAs can improve internal financial planning, design bankable projects, and pursue more diverse funding models. Alexandria's integrated coastal adaptation approach and APLA's mobilisation of diaspora and philanthropic funding illustrate how local actors can innovate with mixed finance solutions.

- **LRAs should align local green and digital transitions with regional priorities.**

This includes co-developing territorial strategies around renewable energy, digital governance, water resilience, and the circular economy, building on local assets. Survey responses indicated serious infrastructure and service gaps in rural and remote areas. LRAs should lead in deploying multilingual

e-government platforms, piloting mobile public services, and advancing digital literacy, particularly among youth and vulnerable groups.

2.2. Recommendations for national authorities

National governments in the Euro-Mediterranean region are central to enabling effective multilevel governance. They define the legal, fiscal, and institutional frameworks within which LRAs operate—frameworks that are often too restrictive or fragmented to allow municipalities to play a meaningful role in regional cooperation. As evidenced by the survey and case studies, many of the obstacles faced by LRAs are not local in origin, but structural and national in nature: weak decentralisation, lack of co-financing options, limited access to information, and minimal institutional dialogue between governance levels.

- **National governments must commit to a structural shift in how they engage LRAs in policy development, programme participation, and resource allocation.**

Despite their centrality to issues such as climate adaptation, migration, digital inclusion, and spatial equity, LRAs are rarely involved in shaping national strategies for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. Formal consultation mechanisms—such as national LRA coordination councils or sectoral working groups—should be established to ensure that local priorities are systematically integrated into national and regional frameworks.

- **Improving vertical coordination between levels of governance is essential.**

Fragmentation, highlighted repeatedly in the survey, means municipalities **lack guidance on aligning with national strategies, and ministries lack mechanisms to engage LRAs in joint planning or implementation.** Governments should designate focal points for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation within key ministries and ensure that national development plans and cooperation strategies include local implementation pathways. Clarifying and expanding the legal competencies of LRAs—particularly in sectors like urban resilience or waste management—is critical for enabling local leadership.

- **National governments should strengthen fiscal mechanisms that support local cooperation.**

This includes introducing performance-based fiscal transfers, establishing

national co-financing funds to match EU grants, and allowing subnational borrowing under clear and risk-managed conditions. Türkiye's model—where development agencies and municipal unions support co-financing and technical assistance—offers a strong example for replication.

- **National leadership is vital for building sustained LRA capacity.**
While many municipalities participate in occasional training, there is a need for structured, nationally coordinated programmes focused on project cycle management, climate action, digital transition, and public financial management. This could be delivered through municipal academies, decentralised cooperation centres, or partnerships with universities and CSOs. Examples like Bursa's entrepreneurship hub and Karak's training centre show how national support can amplify local innovation.
- **To facilitate LRA access to cooperation opportunities, national governments must simplify and communicate funding mechanisms.**
Measures could include creating multilingual helpdesks, translating calls for proposals, pre-screening project ideas, and offering technical and legal advisory support. Many LRAs, especially smaller or rural ones, lack awareness or clarity about funding opportunities. Dedicated national platforms could close this gap.
- **National institutions should actively support decentralised city-to-city cooperation and municipal diplomacy.**
Locally led partnerships—such as Amman and Milan's collaboration—demonstrate the potential of peer-to-peer learning. National governments can enhance these initiatives by providing co-funding, dedicated budget lines, and incorporating local cooperation results into national reporting for EU and UfM frameworks. This is especially vital in politically sensitive sectors like migration, where local governments lead implementation but often lack national policy backing.
- **National actors must elevate the visibility and influence of LRAs in Euro-Mediterranean fora.**
This can be achieved by including municipal representatives in national delegations to UfM ministerial meetings, supporting participation in ARLEM and EuroMeSCo, and promoting successful local initiatives through public diplomacy. Strengthening LRA presence ensures policies are grounded in local realities and helps shift the cooperation model towards a more inclusive, bottom-up process.

2.3. Recommendations for the EU and other regional actors

For Euro-Mediterranean cooperation to become more inclusive, cohesive, and responsive to territorial realities, **European and regional institutions must recognise LRAs as full partners, not just implementers.** While frameworks such as the European Commission and its programmes, notably Interreg NEXT MED, as well as actors such as the UfM, acknowledge subnational action, this recognition has yet to translate into consistent mechanisms for funding access, policy input, or programme design.

- **EU and regional institutions should prioritise LRAs' structured role in regional governance and policy consultations.**

Despite some positive developments, platforms like ARLEM and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) remain largely disconnected from programme design. Structured mechanisms, such as a permanent LRA forum linked to the UfM or thematic dialogues with the European External Action Service (EEAS), would ensure that local insights shape regional strategies, funding criteria, and evaluations.

- **Greater investment is needed in platforms that foster transnational LRA cooperation.**

A Mediterranean LRA Cooperation Portal—potentially hosted by the UfM or Interreg NEXT MED Secretariat—could support thematic matchmaking, knowledge-sharing, and partnership-building. This would be especially valuable for small or under-resourced municipalities seeking regional collaboration.

- **Simplification and localisation of funding mechanisms are critical.**

Surveyed LRAs cited legal, administrative, and linguistic barriers to EU funding. Regional institutions should adapt calls for proposals to reflect local realities: simplify procedures, reduce co-financing burdens, offer multilingual guidance, and introduce dedicated funding windows for small-scale or pilot initiatives. Regional technical assistance hubs should support LRAs throughout the application and implementation process.

- **A Mediterranean Observatory of Territorial Vulnerabilities should be established to inform policy and funding.**

Hosted by a regional body like the UfM and involving LRA participation, the Observatory would track local trends in environmental, demographic, and socio-economic vulnerability—providing foresight and data to

improve programme design, resource allocation, and evidence-based governance.

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- **EU and regional actors must invest in long-term, regionally coordinated capacity-building for LRAs.**

Existing training opportunities are often fragmented and short-term. A regional Municipal Cooperation Academy—co-led by EU institutions and Mediterranean partner networks—could offer modular, practical training on project management, digital governance, resilience, finance, and participatory leadership. It should prioritise peer learning and South–South exchange, with certification and blended delivery options.

- **Decentralised cooperation should become a strategic pillar of EU external action.**

City-to-city and inter-municipal collaboration builds resilience, shared ownership, and people-to-people diplomacy. Mechanisms like twinning grants, municipal staff exchanges, and co-financing for inter-municipal projects should be expanded and embedded within EU-Med policy frameworks.

- **LRAs must be recognised as stakeholders in Euro-Mediterranean policy and programme governance.**

Their inclusion in programming committees, evaluation panels, and foresight processes, such as those linked to the proposed Observatory, will align policy design with on-the-ground realities, especially in sectors where implementation is localised: climate, migration, civil protection, and digital infrastructure.

- **Regional actors should support awareness-raising and visibility campaigns showcasing LRA contributions.**

Promoting local success stories, awards, and achievements aligned with regional strategies, such as the Green Deal or New Mediterranean Pact, can shift perceptions of LRAs from service providers to strategic actors in regional policy and cooperation.

Conclusions

LRAs across the Euro-Mediterranean region are increasingly recognised as vital actors in addressing cross-border challenges and shaping regional cooperation. Their proximity to citizens, cross-sectoral responsibilities, and practical problem-solving capacity allow them to translate regional visions into local realities. As shown by case studies and survey findings, LRAs are not merely implementers; they are proactive agents of change, innovation, and integration. From Karak's renewable energy transition, to the Amman–Milan food partnership, to Zgharta-Ehden's circular economy hub, municipalities are driving context-specific, inclusive responses with significant regional value.

Yet a clear gap remains between expectations placed on LRAs and the support they receive to meet them. While facing rising pressures, such as climate change, migration, digital divides, they often lack resources, institutional autonomy, and capacity. Financial constraints remain the most cited barrier, exacerbated by limited internal structures for international engagement. Innovation and ambition exist, but structural barriers prevent scale and sustainability. Smaller or less-experienced municipalities, in particular, face difficulty accessing complex, centralised funding schemes or multilingual guidance designed for larger entities.

Coordination gaps between local, national, and regional strategies further isolate LRAs from broader policy frameworks. Despite their frontline role in areas like migration or disaster risk, they are often excluded from strategic planning. Civic mobilisation is similarly hindered by the lack of sustained platforms connecting LRAs with local stakeholders. In fragile contexts such as Palestine, Tunisia, and Lebanon, instability and weak infrastructure restrict long-term planning and international engagement.

These structural gaps reflect a disconnect between local responsibilities and the means to fulfil them. For Euro-Mediterranean cooperation to be inclusive and effective, it must respond to the barriers identified by LRAs themselves: inadequate funding, limited capacity, weak participation, and insufficient recognition. Local authorities must be empowered to take a central role in shaping a shared, resilient future.

Encouragingly, a new roadmap is emerging—one rooted in local innovation, cooperation, and leadership. The following directions point toward unlocking the full potential of LRAs:

- **Strengthen technical and institutional capacity** through continuous training in project design, financial management, strategic planning, and digital tools.
- **Promote multi-level and multi-actor governance**, engaging national authorities, civil society, academia, and the private sector.
- **Expand peer learning and knowledge exchange** through structured platforms and thematic networks.
- **Advance municipal diplomacy and decentralised cooperation** via town twinning and thematic partnerships.
- **Improve access to information and communication tools**, ensuring clarity, multilingualism, and inclusivity.
- **Simplify and streamline funding mechanisms**, lowering administrative burdens and offering tailored technical support.
- **Ensure greater representation of Southern LRAs** to balance and co-own regional cooperation frameworks.
- **Design inclusive, localised projects** that engage youth, women, migrants, and underrepresented communities.
- **Support financial decentralisation**, including direct access to international funding and expanded fiscal autonomy.
- **Foster direct cooperation among municipalities**, co-developing cross-border initiatives driven by community needs.

These priorities reflect a shared understanding: investing in LRAs is not just a local strategy—it is key to regional integration. Realising this potential will **require coordinated action across all levels of governance.**

The EU remains the main enabler of cross-border engagement, providing essential funding and direction. But unless procedures are simplified, assistance targeted, and barriers lowered, many municipalities, especially smaller ones, will be left behind. **National governments must strengthen decentralisation frameworks**, enable multilevel coordination, and offer regulatory and co-financing support.

Better alignment between national and local policy will allow for the upscaling of successful solutions. **Regional institutions such as the UfM and European Commission must formalise LRA participation** in governance, dialogues, and foresight, ensuring implementation is both effective and publicly legitimate.

LRAs are not only necessary for implementing regional agendas—they are strategic actors in shaping them. Unlocking their potential is no longer optional; it is a precondition to build a more just, sustainable, and integrated Euro-Mediterranean region.

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Annex: Questionnaire

As part of this study, a questionnaire was launched on 1 April 2025 and remained open until 14 April 2025. It was made available in English, French, and Arabic, and distributed to a closed list of LRAs.

Responses were received from the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, France, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, North Macedonia, Palestine, and Tunisia.

Section A - respondent information	
Name	
Position/ Role	
Local and regional authority Represented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of Region/City: • Country:
E-mail address	
Phone number	<i>For contact in case of follow-up</i>
Section B – Priorities	
What, in your view, should be the three main thematic priorities for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation? Please rank them by order of priority.	<input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation and adaptation to climate change (including agricultural practices and food security, sustainable urban development, water management, the blue economy and coastal development, circular economy...) <input type="checkbox"/> Civil protection and disaster risks management <input type="checkbox"/> Digital transition <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive socio-economic development (<i>including skills and quality education, entrepreneurship, youth and women's economic empowerment...</i>) <input type="checkbox"/> Energy <input type="checkbox"/> Migration (<i>management, integration and related challenges at local level</i>)

	<input type="checkbox"/> Territorial and decentralised cooperation <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural cooperation, civil society and intercultural and interreligious dialogue <input type="checkbox"/> Others, please specify:
What are your main expectations from Euro-Mediterranean cooperation? <i>Please choose one option</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnering and connecting <input type="checkbox"/> Funding <input type="checkbox"/> Capacity-building and skills development <input type="checkbox"/> Replicating and scaling-up <input type="checkbox"/> Others, please specify:
Section C – Common challenges	
What main three challenges does your municipality/regional authority face in the governance of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation frameworks (EU-Med, UfM...)? Please rank them by order of priority.	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of financial resources for implementing projects and sustaining long-term cooperation initiatives <input type="checkbox"/> Limited institutional capacity to manage and engage effectively in cooperation frameworks <input type="checkbox"/> Complex bureaucratic procedures and legal requirements of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation programmes <input type="checkbox"/> Weak coordination between levels of governance within Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (local, regional, national) <input type="checkbox"/> Limited appetite to engage in Euromed cooperation frameworks from peer LRAs <input type="checkbox"/> Limited involvement from LRAs in shaping priorities and policies at the Euro-Mediterranean level <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of awareness and information about funding opportunities, cooperation programmes, and policy developments <input type="checkbox"/> Economic inequalities and social challenges that hinder balanced regional development and cooperation efforts <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty in mobilising businesses and civil society organisations to actively participate in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation projects

	<input type="checkbox"/> Impact of regional conflicts, governance crises, and security threats on cooperation initiatives <input type="checkbox"/> Other, please specify:
What approaches do you consider important to address these challenges? Please give specific examples.	
Section D – Solutions and best practices	
Does your municipality/ regional authority implement any initiative which is worth sharing (best practice) in one or more of the listed areas? List up to three areas	<input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation and adaptation to climate change (including agricultural practices and food security, sustainable urban development, water management, the blue economy and coastal development, circular economy...) <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Civil protection and disaster risks management <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Digital transition <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive socio-economic development (including skills and quality education, entrepreneurship, youth and women's economic empowerment...)

	<p><i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Energy <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Migration (management, integration and related challenges at local level) <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Territorial and decentralized cooperation <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cultural cooperation, civil society and intercultural and interreligious dialogue <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Others, please specify:</p>
<p>Does/Did your municipality/region lead/take part in an initiative of Euro-Med cooperation (including but not only</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>

Interreg Med/NEXT Med; EU funded programmes in the region; UfM labelled activity; twinning/bilateral cooperation...)	
If yes, within which thematic area?	<div data-bbox="656 435 2063 1332"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mitigation and adaptation to climate change (including agricultural practices and food security, sustainable urban development, water management, the blue economy and coastal development, circular economy...) <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Civil protection and disaster risks management <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Digital transition <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive socio-economic development (including skills and quality education, entrepreneurship, youth and women's economic empowerment...) <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Energy <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> </div>

	<input type="checkbox"/> Migration (<i>management, integration and related challenges at local level</i>) <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Territorial and decentralized cooperation <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural cooperation, civil society and intercultural and interreligious dialogue <i>If so, please describe the initiative and related challenges (providing any website or online material available):</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Others, please specify:
Which funding opportunities across the region are you aware of/or made use of?	
What should be improved for better access to funding opportunities (awareness/communication, training, language, complexity...)	
Section E: contact for follow-up	

<p>Is there a specific contact person for the initiatives described? (add boxes for each initiative mentioned above)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes: name of the initiative</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No (Use respondent's details)</p> <p>If Yes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: • Position/Role: • Email Address:
	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes: name of the initiative</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No (Use respondent's details)</p> <p>If Yes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: • Position/Role: <p>Email Address:</p>
	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes: name of the initiative</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No (Use respondent's details)</p> <p>If Yes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name: • Position/Role: <p>Email Address:</p>

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**European Committee
of the Regions**

Created in 1994, the European Committee of the Regions is the EU's political assembly of 329 regional and local representatives such as regional presidents or city-mayors from all 27 Member States, representing over 446 million Europeans.

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