

Conference of Mediterranean Cities - Barcelona +30: Empowering Local Action for Regional Transformation

Declaration and Call for Action

PREAMBLE

Since the launch of the Barcelona Process in 1995, the Euro-Mediterranean region has undergone significant transformation. Established with the objective of fostering a shared area of peace, stability, and prosperity between Europe and the southern and eastern Mediterranean, the Barcelona Process aimed to promote economic integration, political dialogue, and socio-cultural cooperation as a foundation for regional development and mutual understanding.

Over the past three decades, however, the region has encountered a range of persistent and complex challenges that have hindered progress.

Political instability has remained a persistent feature — marked by deepened conflicts and escalating tensions. During the most recent ministerial meetings of the Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean, convened respectively on November 27, 2023, and October 28, 2024, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs expressed their condemnation of the aggression by Israel against the Gaza Strip, as well as other areas, including the West Bank and Lebanon. They further conveyed their profound concern regarding the indiscriminate attacks that were being carried out against the Palestinian civilian population and the restrictions imposed on the entry of humanitarian assistance. The ministers also underscored the need for the establishment of a permanent ceasefire and emphasised the importance of seeking a comprehensive solution that would bring a definitive end to the conflict.

Since the ceasefire and hostage-release deal was announced in early October 2025, the truce has remained fragile. Reports describe continued strikes and reciprocal accusations of breaches, with deadly flare-ups and limited aid access, which remains insufficient to meet the needs of civilians in Gaza. Parallel debates over reconstruction proposals have also sparked alarm among regional actors. The situation compels us to demand a sustained, verifiable ceasefire, the immediate and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance, the release of all unlawfully held detainees and hostages, full respect for international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties, and accountability before international courts for violations against Palestinian civilians to pave the way for a just and lasting peace.

On another level, economic disparities also remain significant. High levels of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among young people and women, continue to affect many Mediterranean countries. Uneven development trajectories and limited regional economic

integration have constrained efforts towards inclusive and sustainable development and human rights-compliant migration governance. While some countries have achieved progress in reform and development, others continue to face structural challenges related to poverty, corruption, and inequality, limiting the region's collective capacity to fulfil the ambitions of the Barcelona Process.

In addition, environmental pressures have become increasingly pronounced. The Mediterranean is the second-most affected region by climate change worldwide, with average temperatures rising at nearly twice the global rate. The resulting increase in water scarcity, floods, wildfires, desertification, and extreme weather events is placing further stress on ecosystems, livelihoods, biodiversity, and essential infrastructure, with implications for regional cohesion and long-term sustainability.

In this respect, the Barcelona Convention-Mediterranean Action Plan system is noteworthy as a legally binding instrument to protect the Mediterranean Sea and its coastal ecosystems where states agree key measures to that end and establish the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development as the roadmap for the region. Local authorities have an indispensable role as first-hand implementers of this strategy. 2025 also represents a celebration since it marks the 50th anniversary of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

Despite pressing challenges, the region has also experienced important progress. Trade has expanded, academic and cultural exchanges have grown, and numerous partnerships have been established between the European Union and Mediterranean countries. The region's rich diversity remains both a vital asset and a source of complexity, offering immense potential for renewed cooperation grounded in mutual respect and shared goals.

Against this backdrop, cities have become central arenas where these complex dynamics converge. Across the Mediterranean, rapid urbanisation and population growth are placing enormous pressure on housing, infrastructure, transport systems, and access to essential services and livelihoods. Yet growth has not been evenly distributed. In many urban areas, investment has concentrated in privileged zones, deepening spatial and social inequalities. At the same time, urban expansion — often unregulated or inadequately planned — has taken a severe environmental toll, contributing to land degradation, rising pollution, loss of biodiversity and unsustainable demands on scarce natural resources, which can lead to various human mobility phenomena.

In response, cities and metropolitan areas must be at the forefront of building resilience and driving just transitions. Sustainable urban development, inclusive growth, and climate mitigation and adaptation are no longer optional — they are vital to ensuring liveable, equitable, inclusive, and future-ready Mediterranean cities.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT

- Local and regional authorities have played and continue to play a crucial role in Euro-Mediterranean integration by driving decentralised cooperation, fostering local and territorial diplomacy, and promoting sustainable development at local level thanks to their inherent capacity to implement policies and projects. Since the adoption of the Barcelona Declaration in 1995, local authorities have proven to be powerful agents of change, implementing sustainable practices, fostering dialogue, sharing lessons learned, and driving progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at local level, even in fragile settings. Being on the frontlines of regional challenges, their work enhances everyday environmental protection, promotes social inclusion, strengthens economic resilience, and connects policy with tangible benefits for citizens on the ground. Being hotspots of greenhouse gas emissions and pollution, they set the example for action to mitigate the causes and adapt to the consequences.
- Without the active engagement of local authorities, no policy can truly be implemented in a way that reflects the lived realities of communities, as they are the essential link between strategy and action, translating global and regional frameworks into concrete, context-sensitive initiatives. Their proximity to citizens ensures that policies are not only executed but also adapted, monitored, and improved based on real needs and feedback. Moreover, they have shown a consistent commitment to strengthening what unites the region, serving as bridges for peace and solidarity.
- The recent appointment of a European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, and the review of regional strategies of cooperation, notably around the development of the Pact for the Mediterranean and the reform process undertaken by the Union for the Mediterranean, are signals of renewed commitment. The increased focus on the engagement of local authorities in these processes as integral actors is also a testimony to their growing role in a more balanced, equal, and pragmatic partnership.
- Local authorities' potential as actors of change is often limited due to ineffective decentralisation processes (and recentralisation processes in some countries), lack of resource transfer, insufficient technical capacity, personnel, skills or decision-making power, and lack of material resources. These hinder local authorities' ability to address their own challenges and undermine their ownership of issues taking place in their territory.

- City-to-city technical cooperation across the Euro-Mediterranean region is indispensable to tackle our shared challenges—climate change, human mobility, social inequality, provision of public services and democratic inclusion. By joining forces, cities can share knowledge, adapt successful innovations to diverse local contexts, avoid duplication of efforts, and build sustainable urban resilience more efficiently. Such cooperation strengthens governance at the local level, enhances implementation and action, and promotes human rights, and ensures that all residents benefit from equitable access to housing, health, education, and environmental quality. In this spirit, Barcelona’s reactivation of its District 11 initiative provides a concrete example of how decentralised cooperation can reinforce ties with Palestinian cities and promote solidarity through practical and technical collaboration.

WE COMMIT TO

- Engaging in strategic alliances with other local governments across the Mediterranean to enable collective advocacy for greater recognition, resources, and involvement in shaping common priorities.
- Ensuring that equity and inclusion are central to all policies and programmes at local level, with particular attention to participation of women, youth, minorities, and populations with specific needs.
- Establishing and institutionalising inclusive participatory mechanisms such as youth councils, consultative platforms, and participatory budgeting, to align public action with local priorities.
- Promoting partnerships with civil society organisations, especially in fragile and underserved communities, to co-design and implement solutions that reflect lived experiences and respond to concrete needs.
- Fostering mutual learning and solidarity through the exchange of inclusive governance practices among municipalities across the Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Participating in peer learning, benchmarking, and capacity-building within Euro-Mediterranean city networks to foster innovation and harmonisation of local approaches.
- Monitoring the social impact of local policies and integrating citizen feedback into policy adjustments to enhance legitimacy and responsiveness.

- Taking part in voluntary local reviews (VLRs) and similar processes to assess and share progress, contributing to transparency and accountability at regional and international levels.
- Integrating climate action into local policies by embedding adaptation and mitigation goals into urban planning, infrastructure design, and the delivery of local services.
- Collaborating with peer cities and regional networks to share technical knowledge, access climate finance, and scale up innovative practices that foster resilient and sustainable urban environments.
- Promoting local societies where all original languages are preserved and thriving regardless of their official status.
- Ensuring that culture is a cross-cutting enabler of other policies to promote social cohesion, fair leisure, and diverse public spaces.

CALL FOR ACTION

We, the undersigned local governments (both municipal and metropolitan), urge national governments, the European Union, regional institutions, and international partners to take decisive steps across six strategic priority areas:

1. Strengthen multilevel and coordinated governance

- Proactively involve local authorities in regional policy processes and cooperation platforms, including the Pact for the Mediterranean and the Union for the Mediterranean, ensuring that local voices and territorial needs are effectively reflected in regional decision-making.
- Support the development of strategic alliances among local governments across the Mediterranean to accelerate action, enable collective advocacy for greater recognition, resources, and involvement in shaping common priorities.
- Promote coherence in regional governance through improved coordination between levels of local government (municipalities, metropolitan areas, provinces, etc.) and across local departments, enabling more integrated and responsive territorial action.
- Recognise and reinforce the role of local authorities as agents of peace, dialogue, and solidarity. Cities such as Barcelona have long championed peacebuilding, intercultural cooperation, and human rights. Local authorities can serve as platforms for coexistence, humanitarian response, and territorial diplomacy, helping to build trust and stability across the region.

- Recognise the importance of decentralised (city-to-city) cooperation in creating long-standing ties among peers and contributing to the accomplishment of SDGs and the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development.
- Reinforce the role of local authorities and associations of local authorities in the EU international development strategy and related funding.
- Provide local authorities with skills, personnel, and financial resources sufficient to tackle, plan and exercise their responsibilities within their territories to achieve high standards in the quality of life of citizens and the quality of their natural and urban environment.
- Invest in strengthening the institutional and operational capacities of local authorities, particularly in policy planning, EU project management, financial governance, and external relations, to fully enable their participation in regional cooperation frameworks.

2. Advance climate resilience and sustainable urban development

- Rethink urban development models to put territorial resilience at the centre of responses to the multiple climate challenges cities face. Promote the implementation of nature-based and circular economy solutions — such as green mobility, urban reforestation, and decentralised renewable energy — which contribute to sustainability, inclusion, and wellbeing.
- Align local climate and resilience strategies with national frameworks and global agendas, including the EU Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Support local economic development, innovation, and decent work

- Champion local economic development models that foster inclusive, sustainable job creation, with a focus on the green economy, care work, the digital transition, and youth- and women-led employment.
- Create or strengthen local entrepreneurship hubs, incubators, and support mechanisms for social enterprises, especially in peripheral and disadvantaged areas.
- Recognise local governments' role in engaging local businesses, educational institutions, and social partners to design training and skills development programmes that respond to current and future labour market needs.
- Enhance the participation of local authorities in cross-border economic initiatives supported by EU and regional programmes, to deepen integration, competitiveness, and innovation in local economies.
- Support women's participation in social, economic, and civic life, recognising their vital role in strengthening governance, and communities and facilitate initiatives that

enhance women's access to decent work, entrepreneurship, and leadership opportunities.

4. Improve local service delivery and democratic legitimacy

- Deliver inclusive, accessible, and quality public services by investing in innovation, digitalisation, and outreach to marginalised populations.
- Adopt participatory and transparent governance tools — including open data platforms, citizen audits, participatory budgeting, and local performance monitoring — to strengthen accountability and trust.
- Establish structured dialogue with civil society, residents, and academic institutions to assess evolving service needs and co-create solutions, particularly in fragile or rapidly changing contexts.
- Encourage a culture of democratic participation at the local level by fostering dialogue, respect for diversity, and inclusive decision-making that strengthens trust between institutions and citizens.

5. Ensure monitoring and follow-up of local commitments

- Develop locally tailored indicators aligned with regional and global agendas (including the SDGs) to monitor progress across governance, climate, inclusion, economic development, and service delivery.
- Collaborate with national and regional partners to ensure access to the necessary tools, data systems, and financial support for effective implementation and evaluation of local actions.
- Advocate for the formal recognition of local contributions in regional cooperation frameworks, including through the integration of local indicators into national and supranational reporting processes.

6. Promote local diplomacy for the sake of a peaceful region

- Play an active role in peace conversations and initiatives to prevent conflicts and to strengthen cohesion among populations, cultures, and civilisations.
- Collaborate through decentralised cooperation to share knowledge, build mutual understanding, and enhance human relations among cities in the region.
- Reinforce solidarity to foster a more peaceful, sustainable, inclusive, and just future in the region.
- Drawing on local knowledge and expertise, contribute to shaping the regional agenda post-2030, notably given the complex global governance context. Local authorities in the Mediterranean can advocate proactively for setting an agenda beyond the SDGs.

- In this context, city-to-city cooperation should draw on concrete mechanisms that exemplify decentralised diplomacy. An illustrative example is the reactivation of Barcelona's District 11 initiative that stands as a model to strengthen cooperation and solidarity with Palestinian cities through institutional partnerships, technical collaboration and shared urban resilience initiatives.

Declaration of commitment

We, local authorities of the Euro-Mediterranean region, reaffirm our commitment to:

- Upholding the **principles of peace, solidarity, and shared prosperity**;
- Working collectively through **decentralised cooperation and regional diplomacy**;
- Deploying effective and impactful plans and actions to mitigate the causes of climate change as well as adapt to its consequences;
- Partnering with national, regional, and international institutions to deliver **on peace, human rights, sustainable development, and climate justice**;
- Advocating for a **new multilevel governance model** that empowers local and regional authorities as essential actors in the renewed Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

To achieve the above-mentioned commitments, we declare the need to develop, foster, or enhance existing or new flagship initiatives co-led by MedCities, such as:

- The Mediterranean toolkit for local authorities, MedUrbanTools, one of the flagship initiatives of the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD), a platform of practical solutions and best practices for rapid implementation.
- The Network of Zero Net Cities, as part of the draft of the updated MSSD to be approved by the COP of the Barcelona Convention.
- The Barcelona Academy for Mediterranean Municipalities, by MedCities and Barcelona City Council, to capacitate both technical and political staff of local authorities within the region.