



ELDW THEME FOR 2023-2024

Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront

In today's world, communities are facing global challenges, perhaps more than ever before, and at a very fast pace. The Covid-19 pandemic, which left a strong imprint on our societies over the past few years and adversely affected people from almost every region and group, has abated but remains a challenge. Furthermore, climate change and global warming are existential threats to humankind that need to be mitigated to the greatest possible extent and to which lifestyles and habits must be adapted.

These crises that people and communities are already struggling with are aggravated by Russia's war against Ukraine, which has triggered a domino effect of humanitarian crisis, soaring energy prices, rising inflation and migration flows in the globalised world.

In addition, two major earthquakes hit the south-east of Türkiye on 6 February 2023, killing tens of thousands of people in Türkiye and Syria and leaving tens of thousands homeless in the harsh winter conditions. Besides the search and rescue teams coming from many countries around the world, local governments from almost every part of Türkiye mobilised and showed great solidarity to save human lives and to provide infrastructure, technical vehicles, shelter, clothing, and food aid.

Under these circumstances, the role of local and regional governments as the bedrock on which citizen participation and local democracy are built, and their influence on the wellbeing of communities, is at its highest and most important point. When crises hit, citizens first rely on their local governments for support and help.

This is why building democratic resilience of societies and increasing the protection of citizens must be a priority. Thanks to its 16 years of experience, the ELDW initiative has the capacity to support local and regional governments in taking action to increase their resilience, in response to these crises. It is therefore proposed that in 2023 and 2024, the ELDW should focus on the general theme of "**Local communities: putting democratic resilience at the forefront**".

Activities organised under this theme could touch open a wide variety of issues. For instance, the restrictions and lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic have brought about a strong technological transformation and digitisation. Digital platforms and other applications and tools developed in response to the pandemic have an important role to play in building stronger communities that are more democratic, transparent, and supportive of citizen participation. However, developments in information technologies have also brought along new possibilities

for spreading fake news and disinformation, especially through social media. It is a challenge in modern society and a necessity for local democracy to ensure that citizens have access to accurate information through reliable platforms.

In addition, to ensure sustainable and fair societies, it is important that communities be democratically resilient. This means that, even in times of crises, local and regional governments should be open and transparent, and commit to upholding democratic processes, rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balances. They must keep being accountable to citizens. Only by doing so is it possible to maintain trust between citizens and their elected representatives, and thus deal effectively with major challenges.

Moreover, to ensure good citizen participation, access to information and resources for citizens, who may be marginalised, excluded and/or underrepresented, needs to be improved. This may include women, the elderly, people with disabilities, as well as children and young people. In doing so, local and regional governments will play a key role in building resilience, by engaging all stakeholders at the grassroots level, in a bottom-up approach.

Finally, to build resilient communities, it is of the utmost importance that citizens are involved in the decision-making process at an early stage, and at the closest possible level, including at the level of their neighbourhood. Only by giving citizens the opportunity to exercise their full political and democratic rights, at local, regional, and national levels, can local and regional authorities sustain resilient communities. Indeed, if citizens feel left behind and are not included in the political process, the risks are that societies will become polarised and fragmented, rather than united, strong, and able to use their diversity in the best possible way. As a result, when crises hit, coordinated and efficient responses will not come up.

Only resilient communities can recover quickly from crises. Indeed, resilient communities are those that actively prepare for economic, social, and environmental challenges and do everything they can to mitigate the risks and consequences in case of disaster or crisis. In difficult times, resilient local authorities can draw on all the useful resources that they have developed together with citizens.

Appendix

ELDW themes since 2010

Thèmes de la SEDL depuis 2010

Years / Années	English	Français
2022 – 2021	Protecting the environment: local communities take action	Protéger l'environnement : les communautés locales passent à l'action
2019 – 2020	Local democracy: building trust. Co-designing local democracy together with citizens and practicing open government	Démocratie locale : les territoires de la confiance
2017 - 2018	Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy	Participation, consultation et engagement des citoyens : pour une démocratie locale dynamique
2015 – 2016	Living together in culturally diverse societies: respect, dialogue, interaction	Vivre ensemble dans des sociétés culturellement diverses : (se) respecter, dialoguer, interagir
2014	Participatory democracy: sharing, proposing, deciding	La Démocratie Participative : partager, proposer, décider
2013	Active citizenship: voting, sharing, participating	La citoyenneté active : voter, partager, participer
2012	Human rights make for more inclusive communities	Les droits de l'homme pour des collectivités locales plus inclusives
2011	Human rights - What about your backyard?	Les droits de l'homme – ça se joue aussi en bas de chez vous !
2010	The impact of sustainable communities in fighting climate change	L'impact des collectivités durables dans la lutte contre le changement climatique