Regional Learning Process | Southeast Europe / South Caucasus

Planning for Municipal Resilience: Safeguarding Critical Infrastructure through Risk-Informed Development

Timeline and methodology
Kick-Off-Meeting: April 2026 (virtually, end of April)
Duration: approx. 1 year
Format: face-to-face workshops, digital exchange modules and expert missions ('peer visits')

Background
Municipalities and regions across Europe are navigating an increasingly complex risk landscape. The convergence of climate-related disasters, technological disruptions, systemic shocks, and growing political conflicts and attacks of various kinds has exposed the vulnerability of urban systems and the fragility of critical infrastructure. Energy grids, transport corridors, water supply networks, communication systems, and health facilities form the backbone of social and economic life—yet they are often overstretched, interdependent, and exposed to both natural and human-made disruptions.

In this context, safeguarding the continuity and functionality of critical infrastructure has emerged as a cornerstone of sustainable urban governance. Resilient infrastructure ensures that essential services—such as electricity, water, mobility, and information—can be maintained or rapidly restored during crises. Protecting these systems is not only a technical necessity but also a governance imperative, underpinning public safety, social cohesion, and economic stability in times of stress and uncertainty.

Risk-Informed Urban Development (RIUD) provides a comprehensive framework for embedding resilience into spatial planning, investment decisions, and urban management. By integrating hazard assessments, vulnerability mapping, and scenario analysis into planning processes, RIUD helps municipalities anticipate risks and design infrastructure systems capable of withstanding cascading disruptions. It enables local authorities to shift from reactive recovery toward proactive resilience-building—ensuring that municipalities remain functional, connected, and secure even amid prolonged or overlapping crises.

This agenda aligns with global and regional frameworks such as the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030)**, the **Paris Agreement**, and the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** (particularly SDGs 9, 11, and 13), all of which emphasize the importance of resilient infrastructure and risk-informed governance. The **New Urban Agenda**, the **EU Strategy on Climate Adaptation**, and the **European Green Deal** further reinforce the need to integrate resilience, circularity, and sustainability principles into infrastructure systems and urban growth models.

Municipalities across South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Germany are increasingly confronted with **complex and overlapping risks**, including floods, droughts, earthquakes, infrastructure strain, and disruptions to essential services. These challenges are

further compounded by risks arising from **political conflicts**, such as cyberattacks, drone incidents, and other **hybrid threats**, as well as the growing danger of physical attacks such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and other regions. Across all regions, local authorities are navigating the combined pressures of aging infrastructure, limited resources, and rising

uncertainty, underscoring the urgent need to strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure and safeguard the continuity of public services.

At the same time, municipalities in each region have been advancing approaches to risk-informed planning, infrastructure protection, and crisis preparedness—ranging from improved hazard assessments and digital tools to cross-sector coordination and community-based resilience measures. These evolving experiences illustrate that municipalities across Europe and the South Caucasus face **shared challenges** and offer **complementary strengths**.

By linking these complementary experiences, this Learning Process will facilitate **peer-to-peer exchange and technical collaboration** between South-Eastern European and German municipalities. The aim is to strengthen local capacities for **risk-informed planning and infrastructure protection**, enhance institutional coordination, and co-develop solutions that ensure resilient, sustainable, and inclusive urban systems.

Connective Cities – the International Community of Practice for Sustainable Municipal Development – is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The initiative is jointly driven by Germany's key municipal associations: the German Association of Cities, the German County Association, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities, and the German Association of Local Utilities (VKU). It is implemented in cooperation with Engagement Global with its Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

Connective Cities provides a proven framework for global peer learning, supporting capacity urban practitioners in developing integrated strategies for resilience, infrastructure protection, and sustainable urban development.

Structure and Methodology

The Learning Process follows a structured approach combining **technical input**, **peer exchange**, and **applied solution development**, ensuring that participating municipalities move from conceptual understanding to actionable implementation pathways.

- **Phase 1: Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (Workshop I)**
  Participants identify key urban risks—both climatic and systemic—impacting critical infrastructure and urban functionality. Municipalities conduct self-assessments of exposure, vulnerability, and institutional readiness, mapping interdependencies across energy, transport, water, communication, and health systems.

- **Phase 2: Integrated Planning and Solution Development (Workshop II)**
  Building on diagnostic insights, municipalities co-develop strategies and project concepts aimed at enhancing resilience in critical sectors. The phase emphasizes integrated spatial planning, interdepartmental collaboration, and risk-sensitive investment planning. Case studies from participating municipalities and regional authorities will illustrate successful

approaches to strengthening continuity of essential services, system redundancy, and adaptive design.

- **Phase 3: Implementation Readiness and Financing (Workshop III)**
  Municipalities refine their concepts into implementable project proposals, identify potential financing instruments (e.g. EU Green Deal mechanisms, EIB, CEB, KfW, and international resilience funds), and develop institutional pathways for embedding resilience in local development frameworks. Emphasis will be placed on aligning projects with European and national investment priorities and leveraging public-private partnerships for infrastructure protection and modernization.

To foster thematic depth and targeted collaboration, participants will be grouped into **three provisional thematic clusters**, to be refined based on local and regional priorities:

- **Urban Systems & Critical Infrastructure Resilience** – Strengthening energy, transport, water, and digital systems through adaptive design, redundancy, and risk-based asset management.
- **Integrated Risk Governance & Planning** – Embedding risk assessments in urban planning, promoting interdepartmental coordination, and linking disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, and sustainable development agendas.
- **Data, Early Warning & Continuity Management** – Enhancing data governance, geospatial risk mapping, early warning capacities, and continuity planning to ensure reliable service delivery during crises.

Each cluster will combine practical exercises, case studies, and coaching sessions, leading to the co-creation of replicable and scalable resilience solutions.

Objectives and Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened capacities of local and regional governments for multi-hazard risk management and infrastructure resilience.
- Peer-to-peer learning and technical collaboration between German and Southeastern European municipalities.
- Actionable, pilot-ready or bankable resilience project concepts.
- Improved access to financing and partnerships for climate-resilient development.
- Practical knowledge products, tools, and policy guidance to support replication and scaling.

Participation and Contact

We are looking for municipal experts from South-Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Germany who would like to contribute a challenge or a solution. Ideally, two experts from one municipality should apply in order to be able to anchor the change process in the long term. The participation costs (accommodation and meals) will be covered. The conference language is English. Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information:

Paulina Koschmieder - paulina.koschmieder@giz.de
Jimmy Yoedsel – jimmy.yoedsel@giz.de

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