



## ASSEMBLY TRACK

# UCLG-MEWA Position Paper

### Key Messages

- **Local governments are frontline actors in crisis and development**

In the MEWA Region, municipalities are essential for delivering services, responding to conflict, managing displacement, and maintaining social cohesion despite severe constraints.

- **The region faces interconnected challenges that require local solutions**

Conflict, displacement, climate change, rapid urbanization, and economic instability are overlapping pressures that demand stronger, locally grounded responses.

- **Stronger multilevel governance is essential**

Local governments must be formally integrated into national and international decision-making, crisis response, and development planning frameworks.

- **Local governments need predictable finance and stronger capacities**

Sustainable local development depends on adequate fiscal transfers, access to climate and development finance, and improved institutional and technical capacities.

- **Climate action and inclusion must be locally driven and globally supported**

Local governments are key to climate resilience, social inclusion, and implementation of global agendas, but require recognition, resources, and partnerships to scale impact.

### A. Introduction

The Middle East and West Asia (MEWA) Region stands at the intersection of some of the world's most pressing challenges, including conflict, displacement, climate change, economic uncertainty, and rapid urbanization. Across these diverse contexts, Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) remain the closest level of government to people and play a fundamental role in ensuring the continuity of public services, fostering social cohesion, and supporting resilient and inclusive communities.

Despite operating in increasingly complex environments, LRGs throughout the region continue to demonstrate leadership, innovation, and solidarity. From responding to humanitarian crises and



supporting displaced populations to advancing climate action and promoting sustainable urban development, local governments have become indispensable actors in addressing both immediate needs and long-term development priorities.

As the world approaches the final years of the 2030 Agenda and prepares for the post-2030 development framework, the MEWA Region calls for a renewed commitment to multilevel governance, stronger local democracy, and meaningful recognition of the role of local governments in global decision-making processes. Empowering local governments through adequate resources, institutional capacities, and international partnerships is essential to building peaceful, resilient, and sustainable societies.

UCLG-MEWA therefore advocates for a people-centered and territory-based approach to development, where local governments are recognized not only as implementers of global agendas, but also as strategic partners in shaping them. Through stronger cooperation, inclusive governance, climate resilience, and sustainable financing, the region seeks to contribute to the Local Social Covenant and to a renewed multilateral system that places territories and communities at its heart.

## **B. Current Context and State of Challenges**

MEWA Region, comprising Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Türkiye, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, represents a diverse and dynamic region characterized by different governance systems, development trajectories, and socio-economic realities. While these differences shape local contexts, many local governments across the region face a common set of interconnected challenges that influence their ability to deliver services, promote development, and improve the quality of life of their communities.

Ongoing conflicts and humanitarian crises continue to affect several parts of the region, generating significant human, social, and economic impacts. Local governments are frequently at the forefront of responding to these challenges, ensuring service continuity, supporting affected populations, and contributing to local recovery efforts. At the same time, large-scale displacement and migration movements continue to reshape urban and territorial dynamics, creating both challenges and opportunities for local development.

The region is also experiencing profound demographic, economic, and environmental transformations. Rapid urbanization, changing population patterns, economic volatility, and rising demands for public services require local governments to regularly adapt their planning and service-delivery approaches. These pressures are further compounded by climate change, particularly through increasing water scarcity, rising temperatures, desertification, droughts, and extreme weather events.

In this context, strengthening local governance, enhancing financial sustainability, expanding institutional capacities, and promoting multilevel cooperation have become essential priorities for the region. While the nature and intensity of these challenges vary across countries and territories, they



collectively highlight the importance of empowering local governments as key actors in achieving sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development.

The following sections outline five priority challenge areas that continue to shape the work of local governments across the MEWA Region: conflict, governance, finance, climate resilience, and Human Mobility.

## **1. Conflict**

Conflict and instability remain among the most significant challenges affecting local governments across the MEWA Region. The ongoing situations in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and parts of Iraq continue to generate substantial humanitarian, social, economic, and environmental impacts, placing considerable pressure on local authorities and communities.

Local governments are often the first institutions required to respond to the consequences of conflict, including damage to urban infrastructure, disruption of essential services, population displacement, and increased humanitarian needs. Municipalities across affected areas continue to provide critical services such as water, sanitation, waste management, healthcare support, housing, and social assistance under exceptionally challenging circumstances.

The MEWA Region hosts some of the world's largest displaced populations, including refugees and internally displaced persons. Cities and territories in Türkiye, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, and other countries have played a central role in supporting displaced populations while maintaining services for host communities. This has increased pressure on local infrastructure, public services, housing, education, healthcare systems, and municipal finances.

Beyond their humanitarian implications, conflicts also affect local economic development, investment, social cohesion, and long-term planning efforts. Recovery and reconstruction processes require coordinated action among local, national, regional, and international actors to ensure sustainable and inclusive outcomes for affected communities.

In this context, local governments must be recognized as key actors in crisis response, recovery, resilience-building, and community development. Strengthening their capacities, resources, and participation in humanitarian and recovery frameworks remains essential to supporting peaceful, resilient, and inclusive territories across the MEWA Region.

## **2. Governance**

Governance-related challenges continue to influence the capacity of local governments across the MEWA Region to effectively respond to the evolving needs of their communities. While governance arrangements differ significantly across countries, local authorities increasingly operate in complex environments that require strong institutional frameworks, effective coordination mechanisms, and adequate administrative capacities.



The diversity of governance systems across the region creates varying opportunities and responsibilities for local governments in areas such as service delivery, urban planning, local development, and community engagement. Strengthening multilevel governance and fostering effective cooperation between local, regional, and national authorities remain important priorities for ensuring coherent and responsive public policies.

Institutional capacity also remains a key consideration for many local governments. Rapid urbanization, population growth, technological transformation, and increasingly complex policy challenges require municipalities to continuously enhance their technical expertise, data management capacities, and administrative systems. Capacity development, peer learning, and international cooperation, therefore, play a critical role in supporting effective local governance.

Inclusive governance is equally important for building resilient and representative local institutions. Promoting the meaningful participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other community groups in local decision-making processes contributes to more responsive policies and strengthens trust between local governments and residents.

In this context, strengthening local governance frameworks, enhancing institutional capacities, promoting inclusive participation, and advancing multilevel cooperation remain essential priorities for local governments across the MEWA Region.

### **3. Finance**

Financial sustainability remains a key priority for local governments across the MEWA Region. The growing demand for public services, infrastructure investments, climate adaptation measures, and social support programs requires municipalities to operate with adequate, predictable, and sustainable financial resources.

Across the region, economic fluctuations, inflationary pressures, and changing demographic dynamics continue to influence local government finances and long-term planning processes. In several countries, municipalities are also responding to the additional pressures associated with displacement, rapid urbanization, and increased demand for essential services.

Strengthening local financial resilience requires enhancing the capacity of local governments to mobilize and manage resources effectively, while ensuring that financing mechanisms are responsive to local needs and development priorities. Greater access to development financing, finance, and innovative funding instruments can further support municipalities in addressing emerging challenges and advancing sustainable urban development.

Local governments also play a critical role in implementing global development and climate agendas. It is therefore essential to ensure that municipalities are able to access the financial resources necessary to deliver local solutions and achieve broader national, regional, and international objectives.



In this context, promoting sustainable local finance, strengthening fiscal capacities, expanding access to development and climate funding, and fostering long-term investment in local development remain key priorities for local governments across the MEWA Region.

#### **4. Climate**

Climate change represents one of the most pressing challenges facing local governments across the MEWA Region. Rising temperatures, increasing water scarcity, desertification, droughts, heatwaves, floods, and other extreme weather events are already affecting cities and territories, with significant implications for public services, infrastructure, public health, food security, and local economies.

Water scarcity remains a particularly critical concern for many countries in the region. Growing demand, changing precipitation patterns, and increasing climate variability are placing additional pressure on local authorities responsible for ensuring sustainable water management and service delivery. At the same time, rapid urbanization and population growth are further increasing the demand for resilient infrastructure and climate-sensitive planning approaches.

Climate-related risks often intersect with existing social, economic, and humanitarian challenges, amplifying vulnerabilities and placing additional burdens on communities and local institutions. In many areas, local governments are required to address climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, and service continuity simultaneously.

Despite being at the forefront of climate impacts, many municipalities continue to face challenges in accessing the financial resources, technical expertise, and partnerships required to implement ambitious climate action. Expanding access to climate finance, strengthening local capacities, and promoting multilevel cooperation are therefore essential to advancing climate resilience across the region.

In this context, local governments throughout the MEWA Region are increasingly investing in climate adaptation, sustainable resource management, renewable energy, resilient infrastructure, and disaster preparedness measures. Supporting these efforts will be critical to ensuring a just, inclusive, and sustainable transition for communities across the region.

#### **5. Human Mobility**

Human mobility has become a defining feature of the MEWA Region. Ongoing conflicts, economic challenges, environmental pressures, and demographic changes have generated significant movements of refugees, internally displaced persons, migrants, and host communities across and within countries. As a result, many cities and territories in the region have become both destinations and transit points for large-scale population movements.

Local governments are at the forefront of managing the impacts of human mobility. They are often responsible for ensuring access to housing, healthcare, education, social services, public infrastructure, and employment opportunities for both local residents and newly arrived populations.



In many cases, municipalities have demonstrated remarkable resilience and solidarity in responding to rapidly changing demographic realities while maintaining social cohesion and service continuity.

Human mobility also presents opportunities for economic, social, and cultural exchange. However, it requires long-term and inclusive policy approaches that support both displaced populations and host communities. Even when conditions allow migrants, refugees, or displaced persons to return to their places of origin, the social, economic, demographic, and infrastructural impacts on host communities often continue long after the movement itself has ended.

In this context, strengthening the capacity of local governments to manage human mobility, promote social cohesion, and support inclusive local development remains a critical priority for the MEWA region. Greater recognition of the role of local governments in migration and displacement policies is essential to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable communities.

### **C. Key Policy Priorities Related to the Political Commitments of the Local Social Covenant**

- **Housing**

Access to adequate, affordable, safe, and resilient housing remains a priority across the MEWA Region. Local governments play a central role in addressing growing housing demands driven by urbanization, demographic changes, displacement, and climate-related pressures. UCLG-MEWA advocates for housing policies that promote social inclusion, territorial cohesion, climate resilience, and equitable access to basic services.

- **Food Systems and Zero Hunger**

Strengthening local food systems is essential for building resilient and sustainable communities. Local governments contribute to food security through urban and peri-urban agriculture, local markets, sustainable resource management, and community-based initiatives. UCLG-MEWA supports integrated approaches that enhance food resilience, reduce food loss and waste, and promote sustainable food systems.

- **Conflict Prevention**

Local governments are important actors in strengthening social cohesion, fostering dialogue, and supporting community resilience. In contexts affected by conflict, crisis, and displacement, municipalities contribute to service continuity, community recovery, and local stability. UCLG-MEWA promotes locally led approaches that strengthen trust, inclusion, and peaceful coexistence.

- **Public Health**

Accessible and resilient public health systems are fundamental to sustainable development and community well-being. Local governments play a key role in supporting preventive healthcare, healthy urban environments, emergency preparedness, and equitable access to essential services.



UCLG-MEWA advocates for stronger local health governance and enhanced coordination across all levels of government.

- **Climate Justice**

The MEWA Region is among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change despite contributing relatively little to global emissions. UCLG-MEWA calls for greater recognition of local governments within global climate frameworks and for improved access to climate finance, technology, and capacity-building opportunities. Climate action must be inclusive, equitable, and responsive to local realities.

- **Cultural Rights**

Culture is a powerful driver of social cohesion, identity, and sustainable development. Local governments play a critical role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting cultural diversity, and strengthening community belonging. UCLG-MEWA supports policies that protect cultural rights and leverage culture as a tool for dialogue, inclusion, and local development.

- **Finance**

Sustainable local development requires predictable, adequate, and accessible financing mechanisms. UCLG-MEWA advocates for stronger local financial capacities, improved access to development and finance, and financing frameworks that enable municipalities to effectively respond to local priorities and challenges.

- **New Essentials**

Local governments are increasingly responsible for ensuring equitable access to the services and opportunities that shape quality of life. UCLG-MEWA supports people-centered approaches that promote inclusive public services, digital inclusion, sustainable mobility, public spaces, social protection, and community participation, ensuring that no one and no territory is left behind.

#### **D. Multilateral Strategies**

The priorities of UCLG-MEWA are closely aligned with major global, regional, and multilateral frameworks that promote sustainable, inclusive, and resilient development. Local governments across the MEWA Region contribute directly to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly through efforts related to sustainable cities and communities, climate action, public health, social inclusion, and local economic development.

The localization of global agendas remains a key priority for the region. Through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs), local governments demonstrate their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals while strengthening evidence-based policymaking and multilevel governance.



Climate action represents another important area of multilateral engagement. Through initiatives such as the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) and the Multilevel Governance Platform for Climate (MLGP4Climate), municipalities across the region are advancing local climate action, strengthening resilience, and contributing to national and global climate commitments.

At the regional level, cooperation frameworks and networks, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC), the Developing Eight (D-8), the Arab Towns Organization (ATO), the Asian Mayors Forum (AMF), Zero Waste Forum, and the Urban Economy Forum (UEF) provide valuable platforms for dialogue, capacity development, knowledge exchange, and partnerships among local governments.

UCLG-MEWA also contributes to broader international policy discussions through engagement with global and regional stakeholders, including the European Union's Policy Forum on Development (PFD), United Nations processes, and other multilateral platforms. These engagements help ensure that the perspectives and priorities of local governments are reflected in global decision-making and development frameworks.

Through these partnerships and mechanisms, UCLG-MEWA seeks to strengthen the role of local governments as active contributors to multilateralism, sustainable development, climate action, and the implementation of the Local Social Covenant.

**E. Policy strategies and means of implementation:** Group a set of policies developed in the region to face the challenges:

Policy Ex. 1

- Municipal Refugee Inclusion Programs (Türkiye and Jordan)

Municipalities in Türkiye and Jordan have developed local responses to large-scale displacement through social cohesion initiatives, community centers, vocational training, and targeted support services for refugees and host communities. These experiences demonstrate the critical role of Local and Regional Governments in fostering inclusion, maintaining social cohesion, and ensuring service delivery in contexts of prolonged displacement.

Policy Ex. 2

- Women-Friendly Cities Program (Türkiye)

The Women-Friendly Cities Program supports municipalities in integrating gender equality into local governance through Local Equality Action Plans, participatory decision-making mechanisms, and gender-responsive service delivery. The initiative provides a practical example of how Local and Regional



Governments can promote inclusive governance, strengthen women's participation in public life, and advance gender-responsive local development.

### Policy Ex. 3

- Trabzon Resilience Declaration (MEWA Region)

Adopted by local government leaders across the MEWA region in 2023, the Trabzon Resilience Declaration provides a regional framework for strengthening urban resilience through disaster risk reduction, resilience governance, social resilience, and environmental sustainability. The Declaration promotes a multi-level and collaborative approach to resilience, supporting Local and Regional Governments in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crises and disasters.

### F. Key recommendations to deliver actionable solutions:

- **Strengthen LRGs in crisis and recovery systems**
  - Formalize municipal roles in humanitarian coordination and post-conflict recovery, especially in Palestine, Yemen, Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon.
  - Ensure direct access for municipalities to reconstruction and resilience financing mechanisms.
- **Advance decentralization and governance reform**
  - Define clear municipal competencies in service delivery, planning, and local development.
  - Promote participatory governance tools such as local councils, transparency systems, and inclusive decision-making.
- **Secure predictable and equitable local finance**
  - Establish formula-based fiscal transfers linked to inflation and population pressures.
  - Enable direct municipal access to climate and development finance, including international funds.
- **Scale up climate and service resilience**
  - Prioritize investments in water security, housing, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
  - Integrate climate risk and disaster preparedness into all local planning processes.
- **Promote inclusion and social cohesion**
  - Strengthen representation of women, youth, and minorities in local governance structures.
  - Support conflict-sensitive and community-based planning in displaced and host communities.
- **Enhance multilateral alignment and advocacy**



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**New Generation  
of Universal Local  
Public Services**

**Tangier  
Local4Action**

- Integrate LRG priorities into SDG localization and VLR/VSR reporting systems.
- Strengthen engagement with GCoM, MLGP4Climate, and the EU Commission to improve policy coherence and funding access.
- Consolidate MEWA advocacy within UCLG for global visibility at key multilateral platforms.

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