



Building resilient regions: Lessons for policy making in post-disaster regions

The OECD has assisted the government of Italy in designing a long-run strategy to re-launch the economy of the Abruzzo region (Italy), after the 2009 earthquake that struck a wide area with the city of L'Aquila (the Regional Capital) as its epicentre.

The report **“Policy making after disasters: Helping regions become resilient. The case of post-earthquake Abruzzo, Italy”** (OECD Publishing 2013), identifies specific policy recommendations and concrete options for Abruzzo to increase its resilience to future shocks. It also draws from the experiences in other OECD regions, either where natural disasters have caused the rethinking of the development model, or where long-term decline has forced such a rethink. These shared experiences can then provide valuable lessons on the types of policy and governance options for rebuilding a stronger, more resilient and more prosperous region over the long term.

The issues raised in the report can help governments to rethink regional development policy in advance, both in the case of regions vulnerable to natural disasters and those facing long-term decline. This report should also be of interest to decision makers, opinion leaders and community residents who want to identify options and instruments for implementing change in their own localities.

From the analysis of the Abruzzo case, **eight guiding recommendations** for building resilient regions after a natural disaster can be drawn. These lessons provide a starting point and a guiding framework to monitor experiences and good practices for recovery.

The content of this report and the eight guiding recommendations address neither the crucial aspects of pre-disaster planning nor the immediate aftermath of a disaster. The focus is instead on the design and implementation of a longer-term development strategy. As it is argued in the report, the resilience of a regional system strongly depends on the quality of the public and private policy responses to natural or social shocks.

The eight guiding recommendations for building resilient regions after a natural disaster are:

1. Make sure that short-term decisions do not constrain long-term options

Short-term reconstruction decisions will impact the options available for long-term sustainable development. Therefore, a long-term strategic vision should be started planning shortly after the disaster. Recovery efforts need to be integrated into a coherent strategy of economic and social development focused on the long-term economic potential and job creation of the areas which have been affected.

2. Identify the economic base and the social and economic drivers specific to the region to increase its resilience.

The shock induced by the natural disaster can become a catalyst to break historic paths for regions which were struggling before the disaster. Since recovery may take time, it is essential to identify the actions with the greatest potential of having a rapid impact on the economy and society. Finally, sequencing priorities will help to provide a feasible timeline for recovery and give early success signals to create endorsement and ownership.





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3. Develop an integrated strategy to redevelopment after a natural disaster by strengthening the dialogue among stakeholders to raise the profile of needed reforms and quality of decisions.

Accompany the process of decision making by identifying conditions for the implementation of the strategy and the actors involved. Cooperation among public-private actors and different levels of government is needed, as bearing the social cost of a natural disaster goes beyond the financial and organisational capacity of the affected region.

4. Strategic choices have to be locally led.

While the required resources, whether financial, organisational, or of capacity, cannot be entirely devolved to local institutions, the strategic choices for the development of the region and the policy instruments to implement it must be locally led. Civil society and the private sector are important parts of such a place-based solution.

5. Use the occasion of a crisis to introduce reforms or standards for the country.

Because national resources and capacity play a role in defining the development strategy for a post disaster region, out of the crisis caused by the natural disaster, standards beneficial for the entire country in case of future shocks should be drawn.

6. Foster public participation to help decision making.

Natural disasters undermine not only the physical capital but also the social and cultural fabric of a region. Therefore, the regional development strategy should understand and reflect the community's vision. Many past experiences have shown that when communities are allowed and supported to embark on a participatory process, they can provide inputs to complex strategic decision-making and thus facilitate a lasting recovery.

7. Make public deliberation a regular component of the regional development strategy

Identify spaces for community deliberation, both physical and online; organise institutional meetings to discuss progress, so as to ensure that the opinions expressed have an effective influence on the decision process. International experience suggests that measuring the key outcomes of a region's strategy is critical for monitoring progress, increasing accountability and motivating citizens and policy action.

8. Build trust, increase accountability of policy-making and improve capacity of administrations

Improve accessibility, quality and disclosure of information on reconstruction expenditures, criteria and timelines as a start. Then invest in resources – skills and funds – to provide information systems for gathering and sharing key outcomes of the regional strategy. Targets of accountability, transparency, and dialogue with private stakeholders and civic society as well as multi-sectorial planning can improve the capacity of administrations. Policy evaluation has a decisive role in offering insights on conditions, causalities and bottlenecks for the implementation of policies and in suggesting ideas for how to revise objectives re-allocate resources and identify the tools to deliver results.

