

3 Future directions for national adaptation policies in Europe

Key messages

- In general terms, countries have taken similar pathways in addressing climate change adaptation.
- Nevertheless, it is essential to further improve our understanding of policymaking approaches and of implementation processes at national, regional and local levels.
- A more standardised basis for monitoring, reporting and evaluation schemes and for appraisal methods would facilitate learning across countries, sectors and public and private actors.
- Capacity building and advanced communication methods are key elements to foster adaptation policy at all levels.

Chapter 2 reports the findings of the self-assessment survey submitted by 30 European countries and provides an overview of adaptation policy processes across Europe. This chapter highlights key issues that will shape the future of adaptation at national levels and for which additional work will be needed to further support adaptation policies. In addition, this chapter builds upon the EEA 2013 Adaptation in Europe report, and particularly Chapter 4 'Agenda-setting issues', which includes the adaptation road map for the EEA (EEA, 2013).

Improving the understanding of policymaking approaches at national level

The self-assessment suggests that most countries in Europe follow a similar pathway in moving forwards on adaptation, i.e. set up a coordinating body, invest in a science-policy interface, involve stakeholders in parts of the process, develop a national adaptation strategy (NAS) and a subsequent national adaptation plan (NAP), introduce soft policies for implementation, and, in some cases, reserve funding, and develop monitoring, reporting and evaluation (MRE) schemes.

It is important to better understand how these generic national level approaches to institutionalise climate change adaptation relate to the patterns of policymaking within each country. Too much

difference between the approaches on adaptation and usual patterns of policymaking may cause difficulties for implementing adaptation. In this context, respondents to the self-assessment survey acknowledged different national circumstances. More effort is thus needed to understand the common elements in the different strategies and plans as well as in the governance approaches taken within each country.

Implementing adaptation strategies and plans

The importance of national strategies and plans as vehicles for implementing adaptation in practice needs to be evaluated. Evidence suggests these strategies and plans serve mostly an agenda-setting function and play a limited role in implementation. Moreover, how to foster actual delivery of adaptation action across sectors in a synchronised fashion remains a key question.

Many countries report soft measures for implementation of adaptation policies, such as awareness-raising or mainstreaming of adaptation into sectoral and cross-sectoral policies. However, such measures do not guarantee that the information provided is translated into actions. Neither does the inclusion of climate concerns in non-climate policies necessarily lead to reduced vulnerability. One of the challenges will be to ensure that adaptation is implemented not only in the most vulnerable sectors (e.g. water, agriculture, nature)

but also the less obvious but still vulnerable sectors (e.g. transport, ICT).

As the adaptation agenda matures and increasingly focuses on implementation-related issues, policymakers can draw upon experiences from other societal challenges. In addition, implementation is not one event, but rather an iterative process. In this context, policy learning, knowledge generation and sharing, leadership and developing capacities are important elements of an implementation agenda.

A better understanding of the implementation processes and incentives that can help adaptation to be taken up is required. This will require targeted additional work, but also an increased effort to share information on not only successes but also failures, expanding the information already available in, for example, Climate-ADAPT and building on other national and international efforts.

Advancing monitoring, reporting and evaluation

The survey showed that MRE schemes are still developing in most European countries. Since specific adaptation goals have mostly not been articulated clearly or differ between contexts, MRE methodologies and indicators are also likely to differ. Although revisiting strategies and plans on the basis of a systematic evaluation could be assumed to be the aim of any MRE scheme, there are various reasons why MRE is challenging to accomplish. In some cases the obstacles are methodological, technical, or economic, in other cases the obstacles are political.

Learning from the various MRE schemes and metrics across European countries is important in view of the reporting under the Monitoring Mechanism Regulation (MMR), the UNFCCC processes and the development of the EU scoreboard. In addition, many policy sectors have MRE schemes in place and more work is needed to better understand how adaptation can become an integral part of these schemes.

The current country pages on the European Climate Adaptation Platform (Climate-ADAPT; see <http://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu>) could be developed further to convey descriptions of monitoring and reporting practice and key results of evaluations. In addition, creating periodic opportunities for representatives of countries to exchange experiences would allow for learning from successes and failures.

Facilitating and improving the use of appraisal tools

The context-specific nature of adaptation and the scarcity of (e.g. economic) data make generic guidance on the identification and prioritisation of adaptation options challenging. Nevertheless, as adaptation policy diffuses from a limited number of institutions at the national or regional level to the thousands of municipalities, companies and other local stakeholders, the availability of a (to some extent) harmonised and easily accessible set of methods and tools would be helpful.

Common frameworks could facilitate the linkage of methods and tools to adaptation questions in a regional and local context. This would usefully include not only quantitative approaches like cost-benefit analysis and multi-criteria analysis, but also qualitative ones such as systematic elicitation of expert knowledge and participatory processes.

Fostering mutual learning between different groups of actors, regions and sectors

The self-assessment survey responses do indirectly suggest that progress in adaptation policy will require activities to build capacity in most institutions and companies and find ways to mobilise the existing capacity. The relative novelty of climate change adaptation policymaking and the fact that climate is just one amongst many concerns of policymakers suggests that such capacity-building can incorporate an active search for integration and synergies, rather than building capacity for adaptation in isolation. Due to the nature of climate change and its impacts, including the long time-frames, knowledge is also continuously being refined and there is a need for initiatives that can be developed or strengthened in an iterative manner.

Capacity can be built by openly and transparently exchanging experiences, methods and approaches. Additional efforts to bring pieces of existing information together (e.g. those from various city networks such as ICLEI) and improve access to and knowledge of adaptation activities on various levels would enhance the exchange of experiences at the level where adaptation often takes place.

Systematic data collection targeting stakeholders at the regional and municipality level across Member States and amongst private firms would be helpful to create a better understanding of activities, main successes, failures and remaining challenges, and

how the local actions are related to adaptation planning at higher administrative levels.

Reaching out to the private sector

The private sector is responsible for a large part of investments in buildings and infrastructure, many of which are likely to be affected by climate change impacts. Many companies, especially those whose value chains depend on ecosystem services (food and beverages, forestry, fisheries, apparel, renewable energy, tourism) are vulnerable to climate change and thus, challenged in terms of adaptation.

The self-assessment does not provide detailed information about the actual preparedness for climate change in the private sector, and, with a few notable exceptions like the insurance sector, little is known about private sector adaptation from the literature across Europe. A targeted dialogue between government, research institutions and vulnerable private sector parties on climate risks and climate change preparedness would not only fill a knowledge gap, but also allow for public bodies to support private sector parties to take actions in view of reducing their vulnerability, e.g. by raising awareness and by using their knowledge and experiences in co-producing relevant knowledge and services related to risk management and response options.

Communicating adaptation

While effective communication is key to motivate and support adaptation policy and practice, it has

received very little attention so far. The choice of means (websites, social media, printed material, mass media, workshops, amongst others) depends on the specific goals of the communication and the resources available. Elements of a good communication strategy include the development of solid content (sound science, target group framing), the inclusion of non-scientific factors (emotions, norms and values), the involvement of skilled messengers as well as a process for its evaluation (Wirth et al., 2014).

One specific challenge is that terms describing steps and main elements in the adaptation policy process (e.g. implementation, prioritisation) can be interpreted differently. Even the term 'adaptation' itself can be interpreted differently — it can refer to adjustments of current policies, new policies, a policy process, or actual outcomes. This may seem an academic or linguistic issue, but can have serious implications for the interpretation of adaptation policies in Europe, their comparison, and even their actual societal impacts. Although the term 'adaptation' has positive connotations to many and may provide opportunities (e.g. additional funding, more attention), some cases have illustrated that avoiding the term altogether is more fruitful, particularly where climate change is controversial and thus provides fuel for discussion about the need for adaptation.

Defining terms clearly or at least making different interpretations explicit is an important component of any communication strategy and can help avoid misunderstandings, enhance the comparability of assessment results, and avoid potential barriers to advancing adaptation policy.