



**European Committee
of the Regions**

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OPINION

Opportunities and synergies of a precautionary adaptation to climate change to promote sustainability and quality of life in regions and municipalities: which framework conditions are required for this?

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- stresses that climate change is an emergency and a global threat that needs to be tackled by political leadership collectively with joint activities and standards by breaking down silos and barriers, highlighting the role of cities and regions as innovators and trailblazers on climate change;
- stresses the importance of integrated holistic climate adaptation and mitigation policies;
- calls on the EU to take an active leadership role in the shift towards a climate-neutral economy to increase adaptation financing, by jointly developing suitable adaptation methods and instruments, step up cross-border cooperation, exchanges of experience and practices, enhance resilience, nature-based solutions and opportunities for innovation;
- underlines that the impact of climate change is uneven and that territorial factors play a crucial role in the right choice of policy mix;
- calls for focus on the carbon handprint to support innovative solutions and to promote sustainability as a "new normal" for all communities, businesses and individuals;
- welcomes the blueprint for a new, more ambitious EU strategy on adaptation and calls for the clear goals and indicators in line with the principles of active subsidiarity and proportionality;
- calls on the UNFCCC to officially recognise the role of the subnational level in adaptation and mitigation policies and to propose that the Parties adopt ambitious targets; calls for the EU to create incentives for the municipalities to achieve the SDGs;
- supports the development of "local IPCC" scientific platforms on climate change to encourage cooperation with academia and scientists in local decision making;
- urges the Commission to pay special attention to the CO₂ pricing system and supports the EP's call to establish an EU27 net greenhouse gas budget based on the latest scientific calculations used by the IPCC;
- calls on the Commission and Member States to involve subnational governments in drafting their adaptation and mitigation strategies and to promote the regional and local strategies.

Rapporteur

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Reference document

Presidency referral, Rule 41(b)(i)

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Opportunities and synergies of a precautionary adaptation to climate change to promote sustainability and quality of life in regions and municipalities: which framework conditions are required for this?

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Global emergency to accelerate action

1. stresses that political leadership should treat climate change as an emergency and a global threat that needs to be tackled collectively with joint activities and standards by breaking down silos and barriers. The EU should take an active leadership role in the shift towards a climate-neutral economy and a more resilient society, in order to safeguard favourable living conditions, and ensure that clear, credible and equivalent procedures for European businesses and public and private institutions are applied globally;
2. highlights the importance of cities and regions playing an active role, joining forces with local and international industry to adapt to and mitigate climate change by adopting increasingly ambitious and realistic targets, and stresses that it is essential to accelerate action across all relevant EU policies, increase adaptation financing, jointly develop suitable adaptation methods and instruments, step up cross-border cooperation and exchanges of experience and best practices, and enhance resilience and adaptation capacities, nature-based solutions and opportunities for innovation;
3. recognises that approximately 800 regional governments in 17 Member States have declared a climate emergency, which sums up to approximately 40% of EU citizens living in LRAs whose political leaders have additionally underlined, officially accepted and declared the serious situation of a global climate emergency; emphasises that this gives great backup for an active leadership pursuing a climate-neutral Europe by stressing a bottom-up perspective¹;
4. stresses that the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the urgency of early and coordinated action – current experience of the pandemic has highlighted the need to improve the resilience of social and economic systems to face large-scale disruptions, as unforeseen crises create compound risks, especially in too narrowly focused economies;
5. stresses that the EU's climate adaptation and mitigation policies need to be better integrated with both public and private sectors, as well as with citizens' activities within EU climate policy sectors: the emissions trading system (ETS), the effort sharing decision (ESD), and land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF). To achieve climate neutrality by 2050, EU must accelerate the decarbonisation of activities across all sectors. Cities and regions, in partnership with industry, have primary responsibility for the ESD sector, especially heating, cooling, land use and transport.

¹ <https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens/>

Subnational governments' connections to the UN SDGs and UNFCCC

6. considers that subnational governments need to play a crucial role in enhancing the global climate ambition, and that adaptation policies should play a fundamental role in the localisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the EU needs to create incentives for the municipalities to achieve the SDGs;
7. calls on the UNFCCC to officially recognise the role of the subnational level and actively promote the participation of subnational governments in adaptation and mitigation policies and to propose that the Parties adopt ambitious targets; points to the local contributions submitted as Voluntary Local Reviews, which highlight that cities are the level where the influential action takes place and where synergies and interlinkages between the different SDGs are best explored;
8. sees the UNFCCC's COP-26 as a crucial milestone in cementing the EU at the forefront of global climate action. and stresses that ongoing activities and commitments by regions and cities should have a strong and visible role at COP-26; is willing to support the EU institutions in cooperating with the UNFCCC to strengthen the visibility and recognition of subnational governments in global climate diplomacy and activities, highlights in this sense collaboration with international communities and network organisations, such as ICLEI, Under2Coalition, Regions4, Climate Alliance and UCLG United Cities and Local Governments;

Towards a more influential EU Adaptation Strategy based on new insights, learning and innovations

9. welcomes the blueprint for a new, more ambitious EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, which puts adaptation in a more prominent position in the EU's 2030 and 2050 climate ambitions by improving knowledge, reinforcing planning and accelerating action, and recognising the need for regional and local-level adaptation policies; in this connection, stresses the need for climate adaptation issues to be built effectively into all policy fields; urges the Commission to develop the new EU Adaptation Strategy with clear goals and indicators in line with the principles of active subsidiarity and proportionality;
10. sees that for supporting subnational governments in their global SDG measures, the EU itself must lead by example; this includes cooperating with potential partners outside the EU on the basis of EU values;
11. stresses the need for a European-wide system on adaptation and a well-functioning structure of multilevel governance with clear responsibilities to enable action. It is important to create effective regional and local adaptation and mitigation mechanisms using joint networks between the public, private and third sectors and improving knowledge, capabilities and financial resources;
12. underlines the importance of nature-based solutions in climate adaptation, as their implementation offer opportunities to address interconnected crises on climate, nature and health, delivering benefits both in the social and the ecological sphere while promoting sustainability and resilience. Nature-based solutions can also be an important means towards the

achievement of the SDGs and UNFCCC ambitions, particularly on the exploitation of synergies between different SDGs and climate action;

13. highlights that adapting to climate change will require a significant transformation, and will need to be incorporated as a cross-cutting priority in territorial planning and management; adaptation policies have significant consequences for health and social justice;
14. notes that local preparedness related to climate adaptation differs globally and also in Europe. Climate risks are currently not extensively included in the overall risk management and preparedness planning of municipalities;
15. underlines that, to be a success, all climate action, including adaptation, needs to be rooted in the best available knowledge and innovation and is fully dependent on citizen buy-in; local and regional authorities are the most trusted level of government, as they know best what is needed and how to address efficiently European citizens' demands and expectations;
16. challenges the European Commission and Member States to support the development of:
 - a. sustainability as a "new normal" for all communities, businesses and individuals;
 - b. sustainability, carbon neutrality, circular economy and resilience as a guiding principle in all decision making – public and private, including budgeting processes;
 - c. sustainability-focused planning and actions based on collaboration, knowledge and good practices;
 - d. sustainability research and joint activities – multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary – to increase and diversify knowhow;
 - e. digital connectivity for all people with sufficient skills as a cross-cutting factor securing the green and digital transformations;
 - f. ways to embed all of these elements in all learning solutions in the European Union; and
 - g. financing for cities and regions in reskilling and upskilling of labour force;
17. advocates reducing the carbon footprint by minimising the negative impacts of products, services and organisations; also calls for more of a focus on the carbon handprint, by showing the positive future impact that products, services or organisations can create in terms of sustainability;
18. supports the development of local scientific platforms on climate change (already existing in various regions and playing the role of "local IPCC") to encourage cooperation with scientists and support local elected official's decision making;
19. emphasises that building personal, community and regional resilience is a key factor in adapting to climate change; stresses the importance of human awareness, learning, capacity development, and concepts for increasing cross-regional and transnational collaboration culture to operate virtually worldwide;
20. calls on the Commission to create and increase the use of European-wide collaboration instruments to co-create new solutions to climate challenges, and calls for digital virtual

coaching teams and peer-to-peer mentoring to support new, innovative, regional and local sustainable development; regions and cities are willing to serve as testbeds to develop new solutions that can address the diverse needs of EU territories;

21. highlights the usefulness of the network of Living Labs for closing the "climate adaptation and mitigation gap" and enhancing innovation for sustainable development;
22. highlights the role of agriculture and forestry (the CAP) in global climate policy, as they play an important role in increasing resilience and sustainability and promoting innovative solutions in rural areas, in this sense, the objectives of the Green Deal, especially the biodiversity strategy and Farm to Fork strategy must be incorporated into the CAP, ending the link between subsidies and the size of agricultural land and linking them instead consequently to compliance with high and binding standards for climate protection, biodiversity, pesticide use and animal welfare, shortened supply chains and the promotion of local production;
23. highlights the positive synergies between biodiversity conservation policies and climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, fundamental pillars on which the global fight against climate change is based;
24. highlights the importance of using preventive information systems such as Galileo and Copernicus in community-based hazard and risk assessments. This requires more systematic and comprehensive regionally and locally-based data mining and processing solutions, such as using satellites and sensors with GIS-aided tools to map the vulnerabilities associated with different climate-related risks; encourages the LRAs to use and exploit available data and services, especially those offered by Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S);
25. highlights the need to further invest in relevance of space technology as it is a crucial component of sustainable and resilient development, in providing relevant information on climate risks and related adaptation measures: in this field stands ready to cooperate with the Commission, the JRC and the EEA to explore actions aimed at bringing these technologies closer to local and regional authorities;
26. points out that adaptation should be recognised as an important pillar of the European Green Deal as the EU's new growth strategy; welcomes the proposed European Climate Law as a way to provide an overarching framework for both climate mitigation and adaptation;

Cities and regions should have a stronger role in adaptation policies

27. highlights that cities and regions are innovators and trailblazers on climate action and adaptation, and often participate in research and innovation projects, such as those within the Horizon2020 and Horizon Europe framework, enabling them to act as ambassadors on climate adaptation across Europe and promote cross-border cooperation between sub-national levels on tackling climate challenges;
28. notes that local governments are responsible for more than 70% of climate change reduction and up to 90% of climate adaptation action, and that no adaptation policy will work unless it takes

into account the needs, views and expertise of local regions and cities; points out that, across the EU, it is estimated that around 40% of cities with more than 150 000 inhabitants have adopted adaptation plans²;

29. digital applications can play a key role in helping LRAs to implement sustainable development and climate goals, or to adapt to climate change. Accordingly, sustainable digital solutions must always be considered when it comes to adaption and mitigation of climate change; best practice examples must be exchanged, while also always controlling the actual effectiveness of digital solutions;
30. points out that, as the climate changes, the most visible impacts in Europe and globally are caused by extreme weather phenomena such as heatwaves, flooding, water scarcity, wildfires and disease, which entail significant human casualties, financial damages as well as the deterioration of the quality of life; notes also that rural depopulation, loss of access to fertile soils and loss of biodiversity are creating social and economic difficulties that are becoming a growing global problem that will have massive consequences in Europe³;
31. stresses the crucial importance of the two climate-focused missions, "a climate-resilient Europe" and "100 climate-neutral cities by 2030"; is keen to cooperate with the Commission in encouraging applications and nominations from communities, cities and regions representing the full geographical, social and economic diversity of the European territories; is ready to develop with the missions, Covenant of Mayors and others an implementation frame to meet the climate neutrality objective;
32. recommends that the EEA, together with various expert organisations such as the Joint Research Centre, the Climate Adaptation Partnership of the Urban Agenda⁴ and the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy⁵, provide regular updates on scientific knowledge and showcase specific projects relating to climate change, impacts and vulnerability in the main biogeographical regions in Europe;
33. underlines that the impact of climate change is uneven and that territorial factors play a crucial role in the right choice of policy; the right adaptation actions depend on specific vulnerabilities, for example in the EU's outermost regions, islands, upland areas, coastal areas and the Arctic;
34. requests urgent measures at the Arctic where the winter temperatures are already 2.5°C higher than pre-industrial temperatures, meaning that sea ice and snow melt at an unprecedented rate as proven lately e.g. by the MOSAiC Expedition. Special attention is needed due to the Arctic's greater sensitivity – referred to as "polar amplification";

² Report on the implementation of the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, COM(2018) 738 final

³ <https://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/climate-change-adaptation>

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/climate-adaptation>

⁵ <https://www.eumayors.eu/>

35. points out the exceptional richness of the Mediterranean nature and its particular vulnerability to natural disasters, climate change, and socioeconomic development. Specific actions are required to increase the sustainability of natural resources, especially protecting biodiversity;
36. stresses that climate change is strongly linked to socio-economic changes such as urbanisation; highlights that Europe's urban areas, where three quarters of the population live, face climate challenges that need tailored solutions and support from the EU and the Member States⁶; underlines also the importance of rural and peri-urban areas where it is sometimes even more difficult to cut emissions therefore calls for appropriate solutions there as well;
37. highlights that the Multilevel Energy and Climate Dialogue has the potential to become a powerful instrument for ensuring the effective vertical integration and mainstreaming of adaptation policies; this should be broadened to cover the entire Green Deal;
38. stresses the crucial role of the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and similar initiatives in bringing adaptation policies closer to cities and regions, and that of Covenant Signatories in implementing the Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plans;
39. emphasises the importance of promoting the use, extension and adoption of innovative digital technologies that improve integration capabilities and cohesion in order to pursue a smart regional strategy. Examples of these technologies are 5G technology, the Internet of Things and data analytics, which need to be seen as enablers for the digital and green transformation of cities and regions, and particularly as disruptive levers in the provision of digital public services, energy efficiency, the promotion of culture and tourism, and social and regional cohesion;
40. highlights the role of energy systems in adaptation and the links between them as set out in the Communication on the EU Strategy for Energy System Integration⁷, and calls on the European Commission to further explore these links in the follow-up to that communication;
41. highlights the importance of increasing European partnerships between regions and cities using the Smart Specialisation concepts; recommends increasing the role of cities and regions in the Climate Adapt platform⁸ and is keen to deepen cooperation especially with the European Environment Agency, the EIT Climate KIC and the Joint Research Centre;
42. points out the need to improve the implementation capacities of regions and cities and the importance of having enough staff, including skilled staff. Especially at the municipal level, the necessary work force must be systematically provided for the coordination of the many fields of work and areas of responsibility associated with the implementation of sustainable development goals and climate action goals;

6 <https://www.eumayors.eu/>

7 COM(2020) 299 final

8 <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/>

Financing and global rules

43. urges the Commission to pay special attention to the CO₂ pricing system. Climate transformation needs new investment – especially in the private sector – for adaption and mitigation purposes. In order to attract the investment needed, the price of CO₂ should be set at a predictable and appropriate level. Such a system should encourage energy and other companies in having a strong role in achieving the climate targets and in creating new carbon neutral solutions;;
44. Stresses that a more efficient pricing system for CO₂ including carbon border adjustment mechanism is needed to make CO₂ a transparent part of the economic system and to foster transition towards carbon neutrality; this would create a new level playing field for sustainable action and is a crucial tool for making CO₂ system transparent on all levels and sectors;
45. supports the EP's call to establish an EU27 net greenhouse gas budget based on the latest scientific calculations used by the IPCC, representing the Union's fair share of the remaining global emissions in line with the Paris Agreement objectives and guiding the establishment of the Union trajectory towards net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050;
46. calls on the EU to take a strong lead globally in order to develop the necessary CO₂ pricing and budgeting systems by 2030 and negotiate similar elements with its global trading partners;
47. suggests promoting long-term EU-funded adaptation-related infrastructure investment; stresses the importance of having adequate funding opportunities for climate adaptation for all levels of government, as well as exploring potential new options for existing facilities and looking into new and innovative solutions;
48. recommends that EU and national governments ensure stable and systematic public financing for adaption, such as for public utilities, emergency and rescue services, and healthcare. Precautionary adaptation calls for comprehensive investment in infrastructure and rescue instruments that integrate climate adaptation and mitigation into overall sustainability measures;
49. welcomes the announcement of Green Bonds to finance climate action; warns that public resources may not be sufficient to address all adaptation needs and that private financing of adaptation efforts should be encouraged. It is important for the taxonomy criteria for and handling of what is deemed sustainable and not harmful to be designed such that they do not become an administrative burden for those who want to make sustainable investments. This is particularly true when these aspects go beyond the legislation in force in the EU and the Member States;
50. acknowledges that the new 2021-2027 framework will focus heavily on a smarter Europe through innovation and on a greener, carbon-free Europe; calls for a bigger role for the CoR in guiding the use of the mix of instruments for regional public-private investment in climate change adaptation and mitigation; this includes supporting locally-led strategies and empowering local authorities in the management of EU, national, regional and local funds;

points out that the European programmes need to promote creating and sharing good climate solutions for the benefit of municipalities of different sizes;

51. underlines that LRAs know best the citizens' needs and challenges and are responsible for the implementation of EU policies at local and regional level. Therefore, there is a need for Member States to involve LRAs in the EU and national legislation related decision-making process. The CoR encourages the Member States to delegate the management of funds and financial instruments to local and regional authorities in line with the principle of subsidiarity;
52. points to the new level of commitment from the European Investment Bank (EIB) to raising the share of finance dedicated to climate action and environmental sustainability by 2025 and the development of the Climate Bank Roadmap⁹; welcomes the introduction of the EIB Climate Risk Assessment system (CRA) for systematic assessment of the physical climate risks;
53. highlights the need to anchor the development of the new EU Adaptation Strategy in the principles laid out in the European Green Deal; urges the Commission to recognise cities and regions as fully-fledged partners within this framework and to better address the gap between local, bottom-up adaptation and national adaptation strategies;

Better coherence and operations throughout Europe

54. points out that the objectives of the Climate Pact rely on active subsidiarity and multilevel governance: the CoR stands ready to provide its political support in the implementation of the Climate Pact¹⁰ and bring it to all cities and regions of Europe. In this ambit, it calls on the Commission to include adaptation action as one of the interventions for this important initiative;
55. underlines the potential of the European Climate Pact as, on the one hand, an innovative governance tool enhancing cooperation between the LRAs and the European institutions, and on the other, an umbrella initiative to stimulate the creation of local climate pacts across the EU and to facilitate the use of best practices, including on climate adaptation;
56. reiterates the importance of embedding adaptation policies into territorial infrastructure and landscape planning and management¹¹: a significant effort should be deployed by cities and regions;
57. welcomes the proposal for an ambitious 2030 Climate Target Plan and calls on the Commission to include adaptation measures and targets in this framework as well;
58. highlights that several initiatives, such as Citizen Dialogues, Territorial Impact Assessments, Multilevel Energy and Climate Dialogues and the RegHub network as well as the European Urban Initiative of the post-2020 cohesion policy, can support both the assessment of adaptation

⁹ <https://www.eib.org/en/about/partners/cso/consultations/item/cb-roadmap-stakeholder-engagement.htm>

¹⁰ See opinion 1360/2020 on "The European Climate Pact" by [Rafał Trzaskowski \(PL/EPP\)](#), available at <https://cor.europa.eu/EN/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-1360-2020>

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/clima/sites/clima/files/adaptation/what/docs/swd_2013_137_en.pdf

action and strategic agenda setting, by involving those directly impacted by climate change and adaptation measures;

59. welcomes the release of the Renovation Wave, as a forwarding-looking initiative stepping up the EU efforts on one of the key areas for achieving our climate goals: in this context, it calls on the Commission to further develop the role of renovation of buildings in enhancing the adaptation targets and making the built environment more resilient;
60. points out that the impact of climate change on citizens varies according to their social and economic vulnerability, age and gender; the social aspect of adaptation policies should therefore be carefully considered in the new EU Strategy, based on the work being developed by the European Environment Agency in the field¹²;
61. highlights that Member States are currently drafting various plans and strategies, such as the Climate Adaptation Strategies, the National Energy and Climate Plans, the National Long-Term Strategies and the Sustainable Development Strategies, and other sectoral policies such as biodiversity, forestry, agriculture and land management; points out that this creates a risk of confusion for cities and regions, and calls on the European Commission to reconsider the overall framework in favour of a more integrated approach;
62. calls on the Commission to strongly recommend that Member States involve subnational governments in drafting their adaptation strategies and in promoting the development of regional and local strategies, as well as a regional breakdown of national strategies; the CoR stands ready to organise Multilevel Energy and Climate Dialogues for this purpose.

Brussels, 8 December 2020

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Apostolos Tzitzikostas

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Petr Blizkovsky

¹² <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/unequal-exposure-and-unequal-impacts>

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Opportunities and synergies of a precautionary adaptation to climate change to promote sustainability and quality of life in regions and municipalities: which framework conditions are required for this?
Reference(s)	
Legal basis	Presidency referral, Rule 41(b)(i)
Procedural basis	
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	By written procedure
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Commission responsible	Commission for the Environment, Climate change and Energy (ENVE)
Rapporteur	Markku Markkula (FI/EPP), Chair of the Espoo City Board
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Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	