



**European Committee
of the Regions**

ENVE-VI/015

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OPINION

Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – taking an integrated approach

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- stresses that a well-functioning multi-level governance framework is of crucial importance, and therefore calls on the European Commission to encourage stronger collaboration between the different levels of government - especially in the preparation and implementation of the national, regional and local adaptation strategies and plans;
- supports EU initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy and the new EU Urban Agenda Partnerships that foster the emergence of coordinated multi-level/multi-stakeholder governance schemes and cooperation platforms;
- points out that the absence of a legislative prescriptive framework is perceived by local and regional authorities as an obstacle to adaptation action in certain Member States;
- urges the European Commission to consolidate efforts to create an enabling framework for capacity building in cities and regions;
- stresses that accessing EU financing instruments supporting climate action is still the biggest challenge faced by cities and regions and therefore calls on the Commission to provide European local and regional authorities with 1) easily-accessible and understandable information and 2) further guidance and support on how to access them, and also possibly combine them;
- invites the Commission to explore further the idea of a fast-track access to financial support for local and regional authorities committed to adaptation action;
- considers that the Commission shall continue exploring innovative ways to channel investments for adaptation actions to local and regional authorities and calls on the Commission to provide them with appropriate expert advice, guidance and support in preparing viable investments and securing financing;
- invites the Commission to embed its climate (adaptation) action further in the new international climate agreements, to reinforce its exemplary role, and help to build synergies between these agreements.

Rapporteur:

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Reference documents

Own initiative opinion

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions –
Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy – taking an integrated approach**

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. underlines that many of its original recommendations on the EU adaptation strategy (CoR 3752/2013) remain valid and should be read in conjunction with the present opinion; in particular, draws attention to the suggestions to link the adaptation strategy more directly with the concept of climate resilience and develop further the concept/assessments of "vulnerability" of different territories; to the proposal to put more emphasis on adaptation solutions based on green infrastructure as well as biodiversity and ecosystem considerations; and also to the warning that it may be necessary to also develop scenarios for adaptation to a temperature increase which is not limited to 2 degrees, if global efforts in the context of the Paris agreement are not successful;
2. acknowledges that work is ongoing on all eight actions of the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (SACC) and results are beginning to show (e.g. adoption of National Adaptation Strategies in 75% of the EU Member States, launch of the Mayors Adapt initiative, now integrated into the Covenant of Mayors) and therefore looks forward to the European Commission evaluation and review of the SACC. Underlines that this is an ongoing process in which Member States should also up-date their own strategies continuously to keep up with the evolving knowledge base and the relevant legal frameworks and international agreements;

A. GOVERNING

Reinforcing the multi-level governance framework

3. acknowledges that, whilst the European Commission and Member States are key players in setting up the policy and regulatory frameworks, local and regional authorities stand at the frontline of reducing the vulnerability of their territories to the various impacts of climate change through concrete adaptation actions, and therefore stresses that a well-functioning multi-level governance framework is of crucial importance;
4. calls on the European Commission to encourage stronger collaboration between the different levels of government (EU, Member States, regional and local authorities) in order to align priorities, minimise contradictory or parallel disconnected processes, maximise synergies between the strategies and plans developed at the EU and national levels and those developed at the regional and local levels – and thus ensure greater policy coherence but also coordinated and complementary action;
5. supports EU initiatives such as the [Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy](#) and the new EU [Urban Agenda Partnerships](#) that foster the emergence of coordinated multi-level governance schemes and cooperation platforms. They should be considered to play a role in reflecting on cities' and regions' needs and improve collaboration. The CoR also looks forward to the timely

creation of an urban agenda partnership on the thematic priority of climate change adaptation, including its economic, social and environmental dimension;

6. emphasises, in this regard, the need for a greater involvement of the cities and regions in the preparation and implementation of the national adaptation strategies and plans. Calls therefore on the EU Member States to create the appropriate institutional structures or platforms to foster continuous consultation and closer cooperation (e.g. through working groups) – taking into account Member States' specificities and asks the European Commission to support and encourage this development;
7. considers that the essential role of the regions shall be better reflected in the review of the SACC (e.g. through a dedicated chapter), and their efforts better supported. Indeed, regions play a coordinating/intermediary role in the adaptation process, making sure the priorities defined by Member States correspond to the needs and expectations expressed on the ground and vice versa. They can also act as catalysts, supporting the efforts deployed by local authorities in strengthening their resilience to climate and disaster risks, building capacities and deploying available financing – as demonstrated by the regions already engaged in the Covenant of Mayors as "Coordinators". The CoR invites the European Commission to further recognise the responsibilities taken and the actions carried out not only by local but also regional authorities in the framework of its Covenant of Mayors initiative (e.g. in a similar vein to what the RegionsAdapt initiative is currently doing);
8. points out that the absence of a legislative prescriptive framework is perceived by local and regional authorities as an obstacle to action in certain Member States. These would therefore welcome a clearer mandate from the EU and national authorities to take action on adaptation. At the national level, the CoR welcomes the recent efforts taken by some Member States in mainstreaming adaptation considerations into specific legislation (e.g. following the Water Framework Directive and Floods Directive);
9. calls on the European Commission to examine how many local and regional authorities, in the EU and per Member State, have an adaptation strategy or plan. On this basis, the European Commission, in cooperation with local and regional authorities, could propose EU-wide and national targets to foster further development of local and regional adaptation strategies/plans by local and regional authorities;

B. INVOLVING & MANAGING

Strengthening multi-stakeholder engagement & breaking the "silo-thinking"

10. stresses that – in addition to a well-functioning multi-level governance framework – the review of the SACC shall put more emphasis on the necessity of multi-stakeholder involvement and a cross-sectoral (instead of silo-based) approach for a more efficient and integrated local adaptation action. The review could integrate (or redirect to) a few concrete examples that demonstrate the benefits of working together rather than in isolation for the co-creation of solutions at regional/local levels. Such participatory approaches should be strongly encouraged and supported, including through EU-funded projects (e.g. under future LIFE or Horizon 2020 calls);

11. highlights the importance of investigating thoroughly the success factors and barriers to different forms of cooperation between scientists, practitioners, and policy makers at local/regional levels. This information should lead to practical recommendations based on concrete examples of (multi-stakeholder/public-private) partnerships which should be disseminated widely, e.g. through the European Climate Adaptation Platform ([Climate-ADAPT](#));
12. recalls the need to raise awareness of the necessity to take integrated adaptation and mitigation action through all possible communication channels in order to achieve the greatest possible synergies between the two strands of the climate policy and avoid "maladaptation". To this end, the CoR calls on the European Commission to explore in the review innovative mechanisms for awareness-raising, increasing acceptance among local and regional players (incl. citizens and businesses) and encouraging behavioural change;

Investing in capacity building and knowledge sharing

13. highlights the importance of building further capacities and addressing knowledge gaps in European cities and regions; and considers the Climate-ADAPT portal – and its associated Urban Adaptation Support Tool – as a good basis for this. The latter however needs to be continuously consolidated and enriched, further promoted and better linked with the Covenant of Mayors platform, and its user-friendliness improved. The CoR invites the Commission to consult cities and regions to identify together how to tailor the Climate-ADAPT portal to best meet their needs, and decide whether the tool should be integrated into the Covenant of Mayors website;
14. underlines the need to continue the collection of good practice examples tested on the ground. The good practices identified in cities and regions need to be stored in a single, publicly accessible and easily searchable repository (such as the Climate-ADAPT portal and/or the catalogue of Benchmarks on the Covenant of Mayors website) to facilitate experience sharing between peers. In particular, such a database should contain the appropriate features that help identify examples which are based on similar circumstances (e.g. climate hazard risks, population density) or present similar geographical characteristics (e.g. location on or next to mountains, a river or the sea) with a view to developing adaptation typologies. The CoR is ready to contribute in the identification of successful regional practices and the mobilisation of pioneer regions, starting with the work carried out by its ENVE Commission and the group of "[CoR Covenant Ambassadors](#)" which should be further expanded and promoted;
15. emphasises that knowledge transfer shall also be facilitated through city-to-city cooperation. Appropriate peer-to-peer and mentoring activities shall be identified, promoted and financed adequately by the European Commission. The twinning programmes already proposed by the Covenant of Mayors initiative have proven to be successful and valuable, and should therefore be replicated and expanded in the future (e.g. through annual calls for applications);
16. urges the European Commission to consolidate efforts to create an enabling framework for capacity building in cities and regions. The profusion of [EU initiatives, tools and programmes](#)

that already offer various capacity-building opportunities for cities and regions (e.g. workshops, webinars, guidance materials) currently causes confusion among their beneficiaries;

17. although some efforts are being made – notably with the recent launch of a [new "one-stop shop" portal](#) in the framework of the EU Urban Agenda –, the Commission should clarify specificities but also complementarities between the different services proposed to cities and regions in the adaptation (-related) field(s), and undertake to fill knowledge gaps that arise during this identification and compilation exercise. In this process, the CoR calls on the Commission to:
 - a. Make best use of its major EU initiative for cities and regions on adaptation, the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, and position it as the main umbrella initiative for local climate action;
 - b. Continue mainstreaming adaptation considerations into other existing EU initiatives with an urban, regional or rural dimension;
 - c. Reinforce synergies with other partner initiatives (e.g. [Regions Adapt](#), [Under2MoU](#), [Resilient Cities Campaign](#)) to harness their experience and know-how, ensure greater coherence and stimulate joint actions for the benefits of the cities and regions;
 - d. Encourage linkages with national, regional and local initiatives, which pursue ambitious targets regardless of their involvement or not in any of the above mentioned initiatives, offer networking opportunities and partnerships.

Increasing the knowledge base about climate risks and vulnerabilities

18. acknowledges that all levels of government – including cities and regions – need a sound understanding of the climate risks and vulnerabilities on their territory to guide their decision making and policy shaping processes. In this regard, the CoR calls on the Commission to further support regional- and local-level risk and vulnerability assessment frameworks as they constitute the starting point of any adaptation strategy and support evidence-base action;
19. underlines that local and regional authorities regularly point out 1) the lack of (access to) useful and understandable climate information and 2) the lack of expertise and experience in interpreting this information as barriers to adaptation action. Further assistance – through documentation and good practice sharing – is therefore required to first guide them through the already-existing information, and secondly to help them in the exercise of downscaling and interpreting impacts at a city/region scale;
20. invites the Commission to further support the ongoing efforts of the cities and regions in climate projection and risk assessment by reinforcing its (research) activities related to the identification of appropriate (risk modelling) tools and methods, the development of (macro-) regional climate impact scenarios and the creation of climate service networks (under the H2020 programme) at international, European and (sub-)national levels. Such climate service networks mobilise the relevant experts and data providers (e.g. the research community) and make the existing information and knowledge accessible to and understandable by local and regional policy makers;
21. highlights the importance of supporting the disclosure of climate risks to encourage adaptation action and stimulate investment. Several new voluntary and/or private-led climate risk

disclosure initiatives are emerging and could be further supported and promoted by the Commission;

22. welcomes, in this regard, the initiative of the Commission to explore collaboration opportunities with the insurance sector as a key provider of data and potential investment. Encourages the Commission to assess insurance mechanisms that could incentivise prevention of risk and support damage reduction and to work with insurance companies to ensure that they share their knowledge and expertise in risk modelling as well as in disaster risk management with the public sector. Existing successful partnerships should be further promoted in the review in order to inspire and motivate others. Also highlights in this context that, inversely, cities or regions deemed by insurers to be at "high risk" may also face particular obstacles to investment and development and encourages the European Commission to explore in the review how such problems could be addressed;

Exploring socio-economic benefits

23. considers that the review shall promote further the advantages of carrying out an assessment of the socio-economic implications of adaptation. Such a socio-economic analysis guides decision-makers by providing them with a clearer overview of the possible costs and benefits of adaptation action as opposed to inaction, and therefore helps to raise awareness, understand capacity constraints and identify the most economically viable policy options;
24. points out that cities and regions need further information on the different existing methods that can be applied for such an assessment (e.g. cost-benefits, multi-criteria, stakeholder decision, experiment and observe) and their relevance in different contexts, and therefore suggests that the Commission provide appropriate support through its reference platforms, Climate-ADAPT and the Covenant of Mayors;

Monitoring, reporting and evaluating the action

25. stresses the need to equip local and regional authorities with the appropriate monitoring, reporting and evaluation (MRE) tools and indicators to inform and support local adaptation planning. The latter could once more be promoted through the reference adaptation platforms (Climate-ADAPT and the Covenant of Mayors);
26. is convinced of the importance of making sure that the international, European, national and regional/local MRE frameworks are mutually compatible and build on each other – this will guarantee coherence and minimise the burden on cities and regions;
27. welcomes the progress which has been achieved to this end since the publication of the SACC with the development of the "[adaptation preparedness scoreboard](#)" for EU Member States and the "[Covenant of Mayors monitoring and reporting template](#)" for signatory cities and is pleased about the strong linkages ensured between the two, but considers that further promotion and guidance on their use are still required (e.g. through the Covenant of Mayors website);
28. underlines that further synergies with other partner initiatives proposed in parallel at international or European levels (e.g. Regions Adapt, CRAFT, Resilient Cities) that have their

own MRE systems should still be explored, but points out that further harmonisation efforts or collaboration should not be to the detriment of cities'/regions' needs and interests;

C. FINANCING

Supporting the access to public finance

29. welcomes the existing EU financing instruments to support local and regional climate action (e.g. European Structural and Investment Funds, but also Horizon 2020, LIFE, EU Solidarity Fund, Natural Capital Financing Facility), but stresses that accessing those funds is still the biggest challenge faced by cities and regions. Calls therefore on the Commission to provide European local and regional authorities with 1) easily-accessible and understandable information on funds and financial instruments available for the development and implementation of their action plans and 2) further guidance and support on how to access and apply the existing instruments, and also possibly combine them (e.g. through tailor-made training);
30. recalls its proposal to adopt a "whole lifecycle" approach to assessing costs and benefits of capital to secure long term payback associated with climate-resilient investments. Accounts and risk registers should be required to include the economic, environmental and social implications of action and capital investments that fail to account for the changing climate, or of the no-action option;
31. hopes that the review will put more emphasis on the potential role of regions in facilitating access to certain financing schemes. Some regions already assist with managing and redistributing the EU Structural Funds, bundling and pooling smaller-scale projects set up by municipalities in their territory, or directly offer financing. The CoR however stresses that further guidance is still needed to help these managing authorities use the full potential of the available European funds and innovative financial instruments;
32. invites the Commission to explore further the idea of a fast-stream access to financial instruments for particular local and regional authorities, based on factors - such as being already publicly committed to comprehensive adaptation (e.g. by joining the Covenant of Mayors initiative), having carried out a comprehensive risk and vulnerability assessment, having developed an adaptation action plan. The revision of the pre-conditions for access to certain funds or the selection and award criteria for grants under the different programmes (i.e. H2020 and LIFE) by the Commission could enable and foster such "fast-track access". This course should also be explored more resolutely under the European Structural and Investment Funds, with the recommendation that all management authorities take up the option already contained in some regional operational programmes of prioritising initiatives in sustainable energy action plans (SEAPs) and sustainable energy and climate action plans (SECAPs) adopted by municipalities participating in the Covenant of Mayors;

Fine-tuning existing financing instruments

33. welcomes the European Commission's initiative – in the preparation of the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – to take stock of the progress in implementing the various EU

funds as well as using grants and other financial instruments (e.g. lessons from the LIFE programme and the mainstreaming of climate action into ESI Funds). This should help to 1) propose the right mix of both mainstreamed and more adaptation-specific financing instruments without reducing the necessary budgetary resources for climate change mitigation, and 2) draw recommendations for the upcoming calls for projects (e.g. under the LIFE and H2020 programmes) – thus filling in the remaining gaps for financing local climate adaptation action;

34. underlines that the LIFE programme – and more specifically the LIFE Climate Action Integrated Projects (IPs) – is considered by cities and regions as one of the key financial tools to test, pilot and demonstrate adaptation actions through a cross-sectoral approach and at a large territorial scale (regional, multi-regional, national or transnational), and therefore highly encourages the Commission to extend and further support it;

Fostering investments

35. acknowledges that many European cities and regions have vast untapped potential to attract more investment and many of them also face serious obstacles in rolling out their own investments;
36. considers that the Commission shall therefore continue exploring innovative ways to channel investments for adaptation actions to local and regional authorities and calls on the Commission to provide them with appropriate expert advice, guidance and support in preparing viable investments (e.g. through the European Investment Advisory Hub or other targeted capacity-building activities) and securing financing. The review could provide examples of mechanisms to deal with private investors and cooperate with insurance companies – and the Commission shall further support pilot initiatives going in this direction;

Blending and mixing public and private funds

37. underlines that cities and regions should be helped to find the combination of public and private funds– from international, European, national and local sources – which is the most appropriate in their local circumstances to finance adaptation action. As highlighted in the mid-term review of the MFF 2014-2020, the Commission shall further look into ways to address the remaining investment needs by pooling EU, national and private funding;

D. EMBARKING on the international stage

An international challenge calling for an international response

38. acknowledges that, over the last years, the international dialogue on climate issues has intensified and led to new international agreements – such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change – and therefore invites the Commission to embed its action further in these global frameworks, reinforce its exemplary role as well as help to build synergies between them;

39. underlines that the review shall better reflect on the trans-boundary aspect of the climate risk management issue. In this regard, macro-regional cooperation appears as a relevant approach to advance EU climate change adaptation by fostering information exchanges and pooling efforts across administrative borders. Hence the Commission shall consider extending and further supporting its pilot transnational initiatives - such as the ones in the Danube, Baltic Sea, Alpine, Adriatic and Ionian Regions - to other macro-regions in Europe and beyond;
40. invites the Commission to put more emphasis on the benefits of region-to-region (and city-to-city) cooperation. In this regard, the new Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy shall provide other regions in the world with new opportunities to tap into the European experience and examples, but also offer European local and regional authorities the chance to learn from their peers in other continents;
41. points out that – considering the recent UNFCCC predictions for future migration flows – the review shall elaborate on the link between climate change adaptation and migration and therefore integrate a new chapter on the challenges and opportunities posed by climate-induced migration. In this regard, the Commission shall explore ways of supporting further cities and regions in facing the mobility and possibly the integration of migrants and refugees.
42. In conclusion, the Committee of the Regions would like to express its eagerness to take part in the stakeholder consultation process on the review of the SACC to be conducted by the European Commission in early 2017 and considers the recommendations included in the present opinion – but also in other opinions on adaptation-related topics¹ – as a good basis for the exchange to come.

Brussels, 9 February 2017

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Markku Markkula

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

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Effective water management system: an approach to innovative solutions – Rapporteur: Cees Loggen

Mid-term evaluation of the LIFE Programme – Rapporteur: Witold Stepień

Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 - A disaster risk-informed approach for all EU policies Rapporteur: Adam Banaszak

Delivering the global climate agreement – a territorial approach to COP22 in Marrakesh – Rapporteur: Francesco Pigliaru.

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Towards a new EU climate change adaptation strategy - taking an integrated approach
Reference	Own-initiative opinion
Legal basis	
Procedural basis	Art. 307 (4)
Date of Council/EP referral	
Date of the CoR Bureau decision	14 June 2016
Commission responsible	Commission for the Environment, Climate Change and Energy
Rapporteur	Sirpa Hertell (FI/EPP) , City councillor of Espoo
Analysis	
Discussed in commission	1 December 2016
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Date adopted in plenary	9 February 2017
Previous Committee opinions	
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	