

National adaptation policy processes in European countries — 2014

Executive summary



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Executive summary

This report provides a Europe-wide state of play for adaptation activities. It offers up-to-date and targeted information to support the development, implementation and evaluation of national adaptation policies and measures addressing climate change.

The intended users are policymakers and decision-makers coordinating adaptation across or within particular sectors. It is also of relevance to practitioners such as public authorities and utility providers (water, energy, transport).

This report draws on the results of a self-assessment survey conducted on national adaptation policy processes in Europe. In May 2013, the survey was sent out by the European Environment Agency (EEA) to authorities in countries responsible for coordinating adaptation at national level (the 32 EEA member countries, and in Croatia in July 2013 as a new EU Member State and EEA member country). Thirty EEA member countries provided their responses on a voluntary basis. Thanks to the high response rate and the wealth of information provided by these European countries, this report presents a unique collection of information and the largest and most comprehensive analysis of national adaptation policy processes in Europe, to date.

In the context of this report, 'adaptation' refers to actions taken in response to current and future climate change impacts and vulnerabilities (as well as to the climate variability that occurs in the absence of climate change) in the context of ongoing and expected socio-economic developments. It involves not only preventing negative impacts of climate change, but also building resilience and making the most of any benefits it may bring. The earlier adaptation responses are planned, the better equipped society will be to cope with climate change – and socio-economic – related challenges.

Collecting and analysing information on adaptation policy processes in European countries is essential in order to evaluate the extent to which actions are effective, efficient and equitable. It allows us to understand and determine which adaptation

actions work, in what contexts, and why, and to share lessons learned across countries. However, measuring progress in adaptation (e.g. through indicators) is challenging for several reasons: adaptation, context specific and cross-cutting all sectors of the economy, is characterised by long time-frames and uncertainty, and does not have agreed targets. Thus, it will be important in coming years to share experiences across countries, and also to monitor and evaluate the progress, effectiveness and efficiency of ongoing and planned EU and national actions.

In 2013, the European Commission adopted the communication 'An EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change' (EC, 2013a) (also commonly known as the EU Adaptation Strategy), which includes several elements to support Member States in adaptation: providing guidance and funding, promoting knowledge generation and information-sharing, and enhancing resilience of key vulnerable sectors through mainstreaming. In addition, the EU has also agreed that at least 20 % of its budget for the 2014–2020 period should be spent on climate change-related action, including mitigation and adaptation.

The EU Adaptation Strategy also proposes monitoring and evaluating the status and progress of adaptation in the EU, based on the following: (a) member countries' reporting (e.g. via the EU Monitoring Mechanism Regulation due in March 2015, and national communications to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)); (b) an adaptation preparedness scoreboard including indicators for measuring member countries' level of readiness; and (c) other sources of information, such as this report or other country surveys recently conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (e.g. the survey 'Approaches and tools used to support decision-making for climate change adaptation') or the World Health Organization (WHO) Europe ('Implementing the Commitment to Act in the area of climate change'). In 2017, the European Commission will report to the European Parliament and the Council on the state of

implementation of the EU Adaptation Strategy, and propose its review, if needed.

The advancement of adaptation across Europe and the implementation of the EU Adaptation Strategy call for more work to be carried out on existing knowledge gaps. The current report aims to support this process, and constitutes input for the European Union's 7th Environment Action Programme (7EAP) to 2020, and particularly for Priority Objective 5, 'To improve the knowledge and evidence base for Union environment policy'. This report is also a key element in the implementation of the EEA's road map for adaptation (EEA, 2013).

With climate change expected to increase in future (IPCC, 2013; IPCC, 2014) and European countries expected to be exposed to projected effects (depending on climate, geographic and socio-economic conditions) (EEA, 2012b; EEA, 2013), public authorities play an important role for adaptation action. They hold a key position for protecting our societies and economy from negative effects of climate change and for making the most of opportunities that may arise for our benefit.

European countries are aware of the need for adaptation to climate change: to date, 21 European countries have adopted a national adaptation strategy (NAS) and 12 have developed a national adaptation plan (NAP). More than half of European countries have made progress in identifying and assessing adaptation options, and 13 report that they are in the implementation or the monitoring and evaluation stages of the adaptation policy process. Table ES.1 provides an overview of national and sectoral adaptation strategies and plans in Europe.

The analysis of the 30 European countries' responses to the self-assessment survey led to the following findings. These results are further described in Chapter 2 of this report under eight key topics.

Findings from self-assessment surveys submitted by European countries

- **Awareness of adaptation and stakeholder involvement**

Respondents report an increase in the public and policy awareness of adaptation, progress in the development of the knowledge base, and involvement of stakeholders. The importance of stakeholder involvement throughout the adaptation process is widely recognised. There is, however, scope for collecting and sharing more experiences of active forms of involvement.

There is also, so far, limited experience in involving stakeholders in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of adaptation policies.

- **Assessing risks and vulnerabilities**

The sectors that have attracted the greatest attention throughout Europe in terms of risk and vulnerability assessment at national level are agriculture, water, forestry, human health and biodiversity.

- **Implementing measures**

Adaptation is most often implemented by applying 'soft' measures (e.g. providing information or mainstreaming). Project-based support was shown to be the most important financing mechanism currently in place for implementing adaptation. In those cases where funds from government budgets have been explicitly earmarked for adaptation, these funds have been allocated principally to the water and agriculture sectors.

- **Sectoral implementation**

The water, agriculture and forestry sectors are reported to be the most advanced in terms of implementing portfolios of adaptation measures at all administration levels. Countries were also asked the policy areas for which they were currently planning for adaptation (e.g. identifying options) and the biodiversity area was reported as the one most frequently addressed.

- **Coordination of adaptation**

Working groups and task forces are commonly used to coordinate adaptation action across sectors and levels of governance. Countries can improve their coordination of adaptation further by learning about the diversity in coordination mechanisms across countries, and by sharing experiences and lessons learned.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**

Seven countries are currently implementing a monitoring, a reporting or an evaluation (MRE) scheme, and many more countries are initiating MRE schemes. A variety of approaches have been used in MRE, e.g. with reviews by independent bodies and self-assessment by sectors, as well as indicators. Countries are planning to use information gained from their monitoring and evaluation schemes to revise either their national strategies or plans. This suggests that countries have recognised that adaptation is an iterative process whereby

Table ES.1 Overview of national and sectoral adaptation strategies and plans in Europe

EEA member countries	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Adaptation policy progress as reported by European countries to Question 12 of the self-assessment survey
Austria											Implementation
Belgium											Implementation
Bulgaria											Formulation
Croatia											n/a
Cyprus											Formulation
Czech Republic											Formulation
Denmark											Implementation
Estonia											Formulation
Finland											Monitoring and evaluation
France											Monitoring and evaluation
Germany											Implementation
Greece											Agenda setting
Hungary											Decision
Iceland											n/a
Ireland											Decision
Italy											Formulation
Latvia											Formulation
Liechtenstein											Formulation
Lithuania											Monitoring and evaluation
Luxembourg											n/a
Malta											Implementation
Netherlands											Implementation
Norway (*)											Monitoring and evaluation
Poland											Decision
Portugal											Decision
Romania											Decision
Slovakia											Formulation
Slovenia											Formulation
Spain											Implementation
Sweden											Formulation
Switzerland											Implementation
Turkey											Decision
United Kingdom											Implementation

Note: No policy

National adaptation strategy (NAS) in place

National adaptation strategy (NAS) and national and/or sectoral adaptation plans (NAP/SAP) in place

(*) Norway had a NAP before a NAS.

Question 12 of the self-assessment survey was formulated as follows:

In what stage of the adaptation policy process is your country?

...Adaptation process has not started

...Agenda-setting (i.e. adaptation is politically recognised as important)

...Formulation (i.e. responsible actors respond by formulating adaptation policies)

...Decision (i.e. policymakers have adopted an adaptation policy)

...Implementation (i.e. measures foreseen in the policy are being implemented)

...Monitoring and evaluation (i.e. review and updates of policy/actions)

Sectors within countries are at various levels of advancement. This diversity is not reflected by the responses provided by European countries to Question 12 of the self-assessment survey as shown in Table ES.1. Adaptation is an iterative process for the sectors involved, and calls for consideration of 'Agenda-setting', 'Formulation', 'Decision', 'Implementation' and 'Monitoring and evaluation' issues, at various levels of advancement.

More information on the levels of advancement within sectors can be found in Key topic 6 (cf. Section 2.6).

learning from planning, implementation, MRE schemes and new information from research are fed back into the process, in order to improve adaptation interventions.

- **Transnational cooperation**

Half the European countries report considering transnational cooperation in national adaptation policy processes. Transnational cooperation in adaptation has often been developed with the support of European funding instruments, and in the context of established cooperation forums such as European regional conventions.

- **Success factors for adaptation**

Progress in adaptation depends on a number of success factors and their interconnection. For example, effective coordination among authorities supports the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders by ensuring the availability of consistent and reliable information, and by ensuring clarity with respect to roles and responsibilities.

- **Barriers to adaptation**

Barriers to adaptation are not simply the inverse of success factors. Lack of resources (e.g. time, money and equipment), and uncertainties are viewed by European countries as the most

important barriers. Uncertainties are a common feature across all levels of advancement in policymaking. Policymaking can benefit from embedding processes that focus on learning from experiences, reviewing progress and policy objectives, and encouraging innovative experimentation.

- **Knowledge gaps**

To support adaptation further in European countries, more information is needed on costs and benefits of adaptation, as well as on risks and uncertainties, vulnerability at local level, and availability of data for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Beyond these findings, this report briefly reviews a number of issues that will shape the future of adaptation at national levels across Europe. Specific and dedicated attention is needed in order to further improve our understanding of governance approaches at national level, and of implementation processes. A common understanding of monitoring and evaluation schemes and of available appraisal tools would also facilitate learning across countries. Finally, capacity-building and advanced communication methods also feature as key elements for fostering adaptation policy at national level in future.

Objectives and intended users

The objective of this report is to provide up-to-date, reliable and targeted information to support the development and implementation of adaptation policies and decision-making across all levels of governance in Europe ⁽¹⁾. European countries are eager to learn from each other in this context. The EEA used this opportunity to facilitate such learning and further strengthen the knowledge base by sharing experiences, lessons learned and good practices in adaptation. By expanding the knowledge base for policy development and implementation, it is intended that this report will inform decision-making processes across Europe and contribute to discussions on long-term transitions ⁽²⁾ and systemic change towards a more resilient Europe ⁽³⁾.

Thanks to the high response rate from European countries, this report is based on a unique collection of information, and it offers the largest and most comprehensive analysis of national adaptation policy processes in Europe, to date. It aims primarily to inform and support the work of policymakers and practitioners who are developing, coordinating or implementing adaptation policies across or within particular sectors. It is therefore of particular relevance to national, regional and local authorities, but is also of interest to utility providers (e.g. water, energy, transport) and to other private stakeholders involved in adaptation actions.

This overview of information complements the information on adaptation activities in European countries available on the European Climate Adaptation Platform (Climate-ADAPT; see <http://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/countries>) and web sites available at national level. It also builds on recently published EEA reports: *Adaptation in Europe* (EEA, 2013), *Urban adaptation to climate change in Europe* (EEA, 2012a) and *Climate change, impacts and vulnerability in Europe — An indicator-based report* (EEA, 2012b), which provided scientific and analytical background information on climate change risks across European regions, as well as policymaking and empirical perspectives on adaptation.

The EEA intends that the compact information collected and presented in this report, alongside member countries' efforts to provide coordinated responses and additional feedback through consultation on draft versions, can offer synergies for use for other purposes (e.g. forthcoming reporting on national adaptation policies under the Monitoring Mechanism Regulation (due in March 2015), the requirements under international processes (UNFCCC and OECD), and the updating of country profiles on Climate-ADAPT). In addition, the experiences and lessons learned shared in this report may help define future EEA assessments on adaptation, and support Member States and the European Commission with the forthcoming adaptation preparedness scoreboard.

⁽¹⁾ This report includes a glossary providing definitions of key terms used.

⁽²⁾ There are several key goals of the EEA's Multiannual Work Programme 2014–2018:

(a) to be the prime source of knowledge at European level informing the implementation of European and national environment and climate policies;

(b) to be a leading knowledge centre on the knowledge needed to support long term transition challenges and objectives; and

(c) to be the lead organisation at European level facilitating knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in the field of environment and climate change.

⁽³⁾ The EU 7th Environment Action Programme's 2050 vision 'to live well within the planet's ecological limits' can be accessed at <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/newprg/index.htm>.

Outline of this report

This report provides a description of the Europe-wide state of play for adaptation activities, presented in three chapters.

Chapter 1 frames the issue of adaptation to climate change within the context of policymaking, and provides an overview of the rationales for public intervention on adaptation.

Chapter 2 presents the main findings stemming from the self-assessment survey sent to the European countries in May 2013. The chapter is structured under eight key topics (Sections 2.1 to 2.8), which are illustrated below.

Findings for each key topic are presented as follows.

- **Key messages:** this section summarises the findings in the form of short messages.
- **What does this key topic include?** This section defines the scope of the key topic within the context of this report, and lists the relevant questions from the self-assessment survey.
- **Findings from the self-assessment survey:** this section reports the main findings from the self-assessment survey under a series of sub-headings reflecting the key messages.
- **Country examples:** the self-assessment survey allowed countries to submit information about examples that they consider good adaptation practices, and this section reports some of these examples relevant to the key topic.
- **Discussion of findings:** the self-assessment survey's findings are put in perspective and discussed within the context of the latest

available sources of information, such as from the IPCC, the European Commission and the EEA (EEA, 2013; EC, 2013a; EC, 2013b; IPCC-WG II 2014).

Key topics can be read independently, depending on the reader's main interests. The complete set, however, provides a broad overview of the state of play of adaptation in European countries.

Chapter 3 highlights issues that are likely to shape the future of adaptation in Europe. It builds on all previous chapters and also reflects on gaps in our understanding of how adaptation proceeds and how it could be supported further.

Overview of the report's key topics

2.1 Public and policy awareness of the need for adaptation

2.2 Knowledge generation and use

2.3 Planning adaptation

2.4 Coordination of adaptation

2.5 Stakeholder involvement

2.6 Implementation of adaptation

2.7 Transnational cooperation

2.8 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation



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