

Notes from stakeholder workshop: Evaluation of the EU's Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, 5 April 2017

Committee of the Regions, Rue Belliard 101, Brussels (Room 52, 5th floor)

Over 90 stakeholders participated (local and regional authorities, NGOs, academia and research institutes, banking and insurance institutions, national governments, industry associations, consultants and think tanks, Committee of the Regions (CoR), European Commission (EC), European Environment Agency (EEA), Covenant of Mayors, international organisations) – a full list is provided in an annex

Plenary session

Interventions from Yvon Slingenberg (Director, DG CLIMA), and Martin Nesbit (Senior Fellow, IEEP, and chair of the workshop), outlined respectively the current policy context for climate adaptation, including the Paris Agreement and the SDGs; and the evaluation project to which this workshop contributed, in particular the questions it seeks to address. Presentations then followed from André Jol (EEA) and Claus Kondrup (acting Head of Unit, DG CLIMA). André Jol set out the latest evidence from the EEA, noting the range of vulnerabilities affecting different regions; and Claus Kondrup set out the action that had taken place to implement the adaptation strategy launched in 2013, across the three priorities and eight actions.

Points raised in questions and answers included:

- the relevance of extra-EU climate impacts, and of EU action outside the EU;
- the importance of a sectoral approach to mainstreaming of climate adaptation;
- a range of specific questions on the background to, and assumptions built into, research on vulnerabilities.

Panel session

The workshop then heard presentations from a panel of speakers, covering:

- **Michael Mullan (OECD)** – experience in the development of national adaptation strategies in OECD countries, noting that while good progress in the adoption of strategies had been made, there was limited evidence of a link to adaptation outcomes.
- **Dr Eberhard Faust (MunichRe)** – on examples of the treatment of climate risk in a number of different insurance markets, noting the potential for government compensation mechanisms and guarantees to crowd out insurance solutions;
- **Sirpa Hertell (Member, Committee of the Regions)** – on the CoR's recent opinion on the adaptation strategy, noting in particular the need for greater awareness, with funding currently tending to follow disasters rather than mitigate them;
- **Dr Paul Bowyer (Climate Service Center Germany – GERICS)** – on mechanisms for providing adaptation-relevant information suitable for decision-makers, with an emphasis on multi-partner platforms such as Euro-Cordex and SECTEUR.

Points raised in questions and answers included:

- The potential for greater involvement of cities and regions in climate adaptation;
- The potential impact of winners and losers from climate change (with greater negative impacts in southern Member States) on adaptation decision-making at EU level;
- Possible positive models for government/public sector involvement in climate risk insurance.

Breakout sessions

Participants chose between three groups for the breakout sessions held in the afternoon, the groups being focused on the three priorities identified in the 2013 adaptation strategy. The reports back to the plenary made the following points:

Breakout A: Promoting Action by Member States

- **What has been the most effective driver of adaptation activity at Member State/ regional/ local level?**
 - A range of factors was mentioned, including: the impact of natural disasters, or of improved understanding of potential impacts; the availability of funding; the existence of national plans, or of clarity on policy frameworks; regional and local ownership of projects; cities as main drivers for action, particularly larger cities.
 - Risk and vulnerability assessments were identified as important tools.
 - ESIF and LIFE funding had proved valuable, although stakeholder engagement in projects was an important success criterion; however, the relatively limited overall budget for LIFE and its competitive nature were raised as concerns.
 - Showcasing of successful actions and projects, and effective networking, were also mentioned. The Covenant of Mayors had been valuable in creating more bottom-up pressure for action at the local level.
- **What has been the contribution of the EU Adaptation Strategy to Member State/ local/regional action?**
 - Views on the relevance of the strategy varied; in some Member States, it had been the key inspiration for development of strategies in plans, in others it had been less relevant – although the availability of EU funding linked to the strategy (particularly through the ESIF) was important. Even where it had triggered action at the national level, it had not necessarily been effective at subnational level –although the Covenant of Mayors was mentioned by several participants as a valuable tool.
 - The strategy had also helped to promote coherence in Member State action; and to emphasise the importance of cooperation, and of the exchange of best practices. Coherence had in part been facilitated by the mainstreaming of adaptation in EU policy in a range of sectors.
- **How should performance at Member State (and subnational) level be monitored and assessed?**
 - A broad range of indicators were mentioned; although it was recognised that improvements in resilience were difficult to monitor. The robustness and effectiveness of decision-making, and the process for prioritisation of adaptation investments (based on a sound business case and the maximisation of co-benefits) were important criteria to reflect.
 - An EU-level scoreboard was seen as helping to ensure a common and consistent set of indicators. The authors of national strategies should not also be responsible for their assessment, which should be independent; and the local and regional levels were important in monitoring and evaluation. It was also important to ensure that the EU and Member States were delivering on their commitments under the Paris Agreement; it was therefore necessary to be able to assess whether the collective actions of the EU and its Member States were sufficient to deliver the global goals.

Breakout B: Better-informed decision-making

Following a presentation from Nicolas Faivre (Commission, DG RTD) on Research and Innovation in Horizon 2020, and its contribution to the EU Adaptation Strategy (see PowerPoint file), participants focused on four questions, as set out below. Points raised included:

- **What is the relevant evidence base for adaptation action?**
 - Differences between the evidence used by economists, scientists, and engineers were noted.
 - Decision-makers have a strong preference for point estimates (e.g. expected increase of average or extreme temperatures), while climate scientists work with ranges, which are more difficult to communicate. Decision-takers are uncomfortable taking decisions based on ranges of parameters.
 - Cultural barriers to action, and issues of decision-making in uncertainty, needed to be addressed. It was therefore important to ensure a more effective and cross-disciplinary approach.

- Local stakeholders, including local governments should develop local vulnerability assessments, which take the specifics of the region/city into consideration. These assessments should not be based on findings e.g. from IPCC reports, which were not designed for this scale.
- Stakeholders need to be involved and over a long period. For example, when developing research proposals under Horizon 2020, municipalities should take part right from the start in developing the research questions that matter to them (rather than being involved at later stages).
- **What areas of knowledge gap have not been properly addressed?**
 - Information needed to be tailor-made to sector-specific groups; the example of the forestry sector was quoted, where the relevant timescales were much longer than for other sectors, and the information on climate impacts made available needed to reflect this in order to be effective.
 - Generally, there exists a lot of knowledge and data, but it needs to be made accessible to local actors, e.g. local government in a way that meets their needs.
 - In addition, engaging key stakeholders and society more broadly was key; evidence needed to be made available in ways that were accessible to users, while remaining accurate.
 - The governance structures need to be adapted, for example, adaptation is not only about technical parameters (e.g. heavy rain incidents) but equally about social aspects, especially related to vulnerable population groups (e.g. elderly people affected by heatwaves).
 - Greater understanding of mitigation co-benefits (“adaptation *for* climate change as well as *to* climate change”) was needed.
- **What contribution do EU-wide vulnerability assessments make?**
 - Sectoral coherence benefited from an EU-wide approach; which could also help to promote cross-region learning. North-South exchanges could also be valuable, in order to promote understanding of the range of potential impacts affecting the EU economy.
 - EU-wide vulnerability assessments can be valuable for exchange of good practice across different regions in the EU and across Member States. They are also an important tool for awareness-raising and showing the European scale of the adaptation challenge and needs.
 - However, EU-wide vulnerability assessments should not be expected to be useful at the local level, where contexts vary and further information is needed. An EU-wide assessment will not be sufficient to decide local adaptation actions.
- **What is the value of Climate-Adapt as a tool? How well used is it?**
 - The current evaluation exercise for Climate Adapt was welcomed as an opportunity for constructive engagement in its design. The information made available was useful in gaining understanding of what other areas were doing, and what was happening at European scale; but less useful in designing locally or regionally relevant action.
 - In this sense, the Climate-Adapt website works less as a tool but more like a database. It should be further developed with an EU-wide focus and not aim at including all possible kind of information on climate adaptation. There is a role of national, regional and local websites on climate change adaptation, and stakeholders will consult these anyway.
 - The results/key findings of European research projects (especially Horizon 2020) should be integrated into the Climate-Adapt website.
 - An emphasis on co-benefits (for example, jobs) would help in generating city-level interest in investment.

Breakout C: Climate-proofing EU action

The actions covered under this priority are broad-ranging, including sectors with an interest in EU funding; improving the resilience of infrastructure; and promoting insurance instruments. Participants were asked to identify what had been the areas of success in climate-proofing, and what were the areas where progress had not been sufficient.

- **Action 6: CAP, cohesion policy, and the CFP**
 - Introduction of thematic objective 5 (resilience and adaptation) in ESIF programming had been effective in sparking interest at national/regional level in some Member States – but it was not clear how well this translated into adaptation outcomes.
 - Adaptation may be more difficult to deliver in programmes under shared management than mitigation; the objective risks being side-lined when projects are implemented at local level, and there is a risk that projects with different underlying objectives are labelled as “adaptation” in order to secure funding.
 - There were some success stories on adaptation in the CAP (water management in some Southern Member States; animal health management), although on balance participants felt that more could be done.
 - Other areas of policy which might benefit from attention were mentioned – trade; nature, in particular the promotion of co-benefits of ecosystem-based adaptation; and development and neighbourhood instruments.
 - Policies and programmes were sometimes slow to react to changes in knowledge about adaptation needs.
- **Action 7: more resilient infrastructure**
 - The development of technical standards had helped to raise awareness, although further work was needed on how to use data and scenarios, and on data quality.
 - Standards were currently based on current or historic environmental data; further work was needed to ensure that they are consistent with project climate scenarios. The Copernicus programme was expected to help in this regard by providing high quality data at a local level.
 - Social justice issues were mentioned – with poorer neighbourhoods being less resilient to climate change; social co-benefits could be an additional driver for adapted infrastructure development, strengthening the political case for investment.
- **Action 8: Insurance**
 - The group exchanged information on examples of national approaches.
 - A key issue to address was the balance between private risk insurance, and Government guarantees, including implicit guarantees; it was suggested there was a fine balance between the approaches, with room for different answers in different Member States.
 - Other products were also relevant – for example, the development of weather-linked derivatives.

Report back from breakout groups, and close of the workshop

Additional issues raised by the audience in the final plenary sessions were on **public versus private insurance mechanisms**, where the importance of clarity on the approach adopted in each Member State was emphasised; and on **adaptation in engineering solutions adopted to mitigation**, where some mal-adapted energy efficiency solutions pointed to the need for an integrated approach.

The chair noted some commonality between the discussions in the groups, particularly in relation to the need for research to be made available in forms decision-makers could use, and on the need for better understanding of social and cultural barriers to adaptation. Claus Kondrup from DG CLIMA closed the workshop by thanking participants warmly for their engagement, and looking ahead to the second workshop, to be held in the Autumn of 2017.