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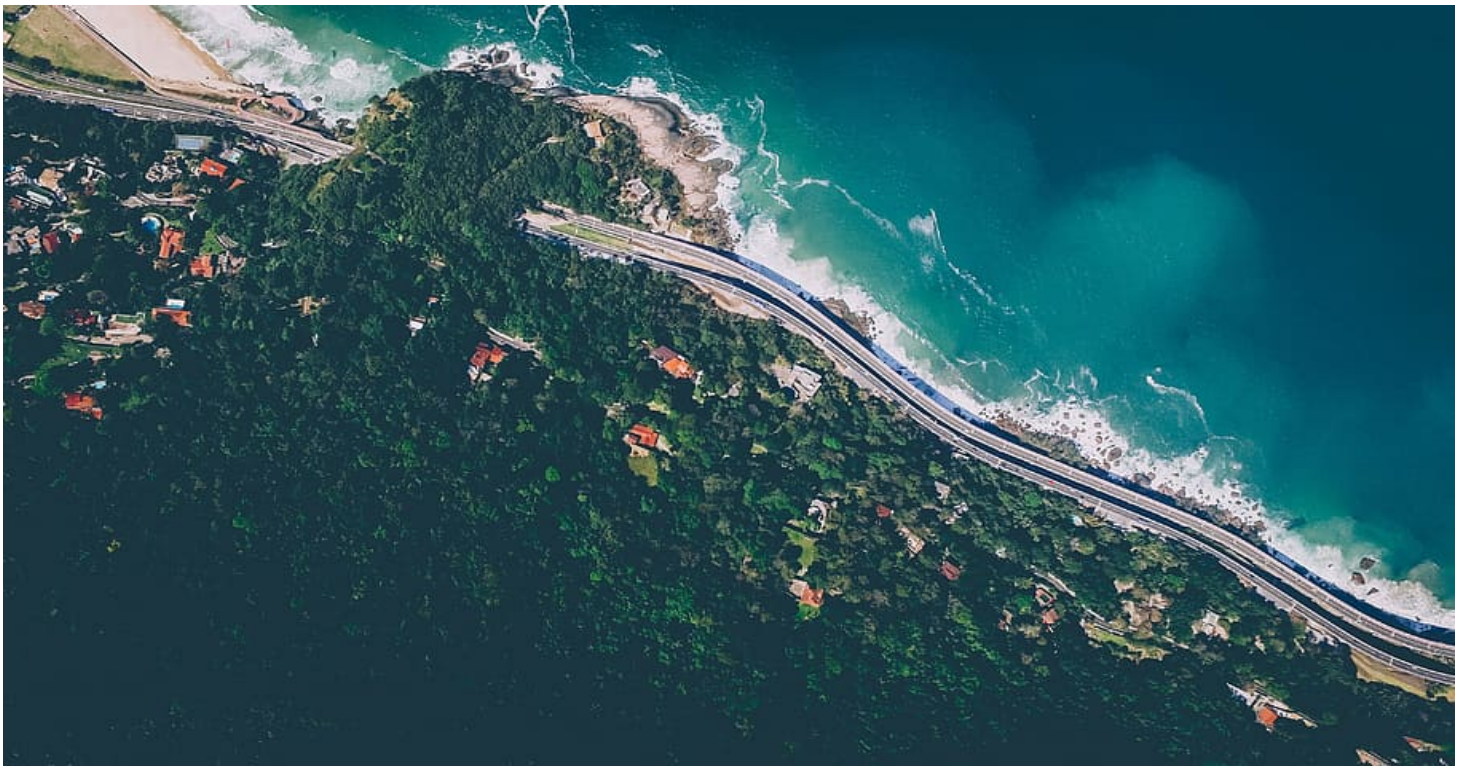
Resilience and Green recovery in Europe: the critical role of the EU Adaptation Strategy

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In line with the launch of the Green Deal, the European Commission is preparing a revised [EU Adaptation Strategy](#) to spearhead Europe's drive for climate resilience. Set for adoption in 2021, it will replace the 2013 EU Adaptation Strategy. The challenges for the EU is to promote action for long-term adaptation and reduce vulnerabilities while drawing lessons learned from the current health crisis and better integrating adaptation goals (at the European level and across Member States) in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. What progress has been made? What are the main features and blindspots of the new plan? And will this strategy encourage EU leadership at the global level and engagement to meet the Global Goal on Adaptation?

Progress made

Since the adoption of the 2013 EU Adaptation Strategy, progress has been made across the three objectives set forward in the strategy: promoting action by Member States; 'climate-proofing' action at the EU level, and facilitating informed decision-making. In addition, all Member States have adopted comprehensive National Adaptation Strategies¹ that allow better coordination, mainstreaming, and information sharing activities. Scorecards developed by the Commission make it possible to assess these strategies and their strengths and weaknesses in governance arrangements, adaptation action planning processes and knowledge support. At the same time, multi-level governance is reinforced through the EU Global Covenant of Mayors that engages the sub-national level (e.g. city level) in climate and energy activities. To ensure evidence-based and scientifically informed policies, technical studies and models on climate trends, hazards and vulnerabilities are pioneered by the Climate-Adapt platform, EU climate services such Copernicus and Horizon 2020 funded research projects. And climate-proofing funds have been at the heart of mainstreaming adaptation with relative success.

Despite such progress made, the [evaluation carried out by the European Commission in 2018](#) called for a “switch in focus from knowledge generation to action”.

Will the updated strategy lead the EU towards transformative adaptation?

Firstly, reinforcing action will benefit from an updated adaptation framing, underpinned by new measures on reporting on adaptation action. By aligning the strategy to international climate agreements, notably the Paris Agreement's art. 7 and Global Goal on Adaptation,² the strategy brings in new governance arrangements and policies on transparency and reporting. Relying on these new tools, Member States will have priorities around tracking and reporting adaptation activities, which will feed into the Global Stocktake (cf. art. 14 of the Paris Climate Agreement). This will encourage accountability of national strategies to appraise progress in adaptation action plans and put pressure on coordination from the local to national level to inform tracking. As the focus remains on national and sub-national governments, there is room to increase engagement, participation and responsibility from the private sector.

Secondly, the updated strategy is set to jumpstart a shift from knowledge to action, i.e. addressing systemic risks such as the disruptive consequences of climate change on financial markets and institutions. Stakeholders are interested in leveraging the EU climate programs' various technical and modeling capabilities to identify vulnerability hot spots, which could support business continuity plans. The resilience of such plans and business models earmarks the interconnectedness of economies and cascading effects of climate risks. As surfaced with the economic effects of the current health crisis, transboundary risks on global supply chains represent a critical issue for the EU. The Adaptation Strategy should therefore employ available expertise and data to integrate spillover effects in EU trade policy (see [Adams et al., 2020](#)). In addition, critical issues also include climate-security links (climate-induced migration and potential conflicts) ([Adelphi research gemeinnützige GmbH, 2020](#)), cross-boundary effects of adaptation, lack of adaptation or even maladaptation in non-EU countries ([Magnan et al., 2015](#)); such concerns call for international dialogue on the design of coordination mechanisms, and should be tackled by the EU Adaptation Strategy.

Thirdly, there is still room for improvement on mainstreaming EU policies and programmes, as mixed results were found the 2018 evaluation on the success of making resilience a condition to access EU funds (e.g. European Structural and Investment Funds), for example in sectors such as fisheries. As the evaluation showed, out of 25.4% of climate related expenditures across various EU funds, 11.4% were allocated to direct mitigation, 3.1% to adaptation and 10.8% categorized as supportive for both ([European Commission, 2018](#)).

Climate-proofing investments will be at the heart of ambitious adaptation action. This is especially critical in the context of the Green Deal initiative launched in 2019 and Covid-19-related recovery packages. As for the former, a revised set of taxonomy rules including new criteria for adaptation will lay the ground for climate-resilient investments. However, it is not yet clear how the private and public sector will use this taxonomy and how investments in adaptation will be reinforced and measured. In parallel, Heads of State agreed this summer that 30% of the EU Recovery Fund should be aligned to environmental goals ([Berghmans, 2020](#)). Member States have followed this strong signal by integrating climate resilience in their national recovery plans. For example, France issued a recovery package last week that includes three particular measures referring to adaptation: reinforcing ecosystem resilience in coastal areas, strengthening infrastructure resilience against cyclones in the Greater Antilles, and adapting potable water systems ([French government, 2020](#); *in French*) These initiatives couple with renewed action plans calls for systemically tracking the benefits of adaptation investments to reinforce mainstreaming adaptation in EU funds.

Adaptation and resilience in the wake of the COVID19 crisis

The rapid dynamics of climate change, transboundary risks and deeply embedded socio-economic vulnerabilities exposed by the current health crisis highlights the urgency for long-term planning together with strengthened policy action and investment in resilience and adaptation. The updated strategy is set out to make health a priority area with a new health observatory and relevant early warning systems. The pandemic also highlighted the need to anticipate and act on risks in an international effort as such crises are global. Addressing transboundary risks within Europe and with external partners will be a central pillar of this new systemic thinking on adaptation, which will require new models of international cooperation and coordination, and significant participation of EU Member States. Climate proofing of EU policies across trade, agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure standards should be part of new trajectory for Europe in “building back better” in the aftermath of the current crisis. Even more, at the crossroads of emerging EU programs (Green Deal, Climate Law, crisis recovery packages), reinforcing adaptation investments as separate and complimentary to mitigation expenditures sharpens sustainable finance framing and paves a path towards Europe's climate resilience. With the launch of the updated strategy, the EU has a critical role to exhibit leadership on adaptation reporting and transparency, to encourage action around meeting the Global Goal on Adaptation.

¹ With the exception of Latvia, that is in the process of adopting its NAS.

² https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf

CLIMATE

PACTE VERT EUROPÉEN

ADAPTATION

UE

GREEN DEAL

COVID-19