



# Climate change

## How can regions mitigate and adapt to climate change?

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### POLICY PAPER

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#### Thematic capitalisation

*Over the last seven years the INTERREG IVC programme has been enabling public institutions all over Europe – over 2000 in total – to ‘learn through cooperation’ across 204 different interregional projects aimed at improving regional policies.*

*In June 2012, the programme commissioned a team of thematic experts to analyse, benchmark, and capitalise on the wealth of knowledge generated by projects working on similar regional development issues. Altogether, 12 policy themes, ranging from innovation to the environment, have been covered. 12 reports are now available detailing the insights and lessons from this capitalisation process for the benefit of all regions across Europe.*

*This policy paper distils the essential findings of the report into a ‘ready-to-use’ tool to convince policymakers of not only the need for change, but exactly what change is required.*

#### The regional challenge of climate change

Climate change - a significant and lasting change in the distribution of weather patterns - is considered by many the defining challenge of this century. Scientists now largely agree that climate change is caused by human activity, mainly the release of ‘greenhouse gases’ into the atmosphere.

The impacts of climate change can already be observed in Europe and worldwide. Extreme weather events like heat waves, droughts, storms and floods are becoming more common or more intense. The longer-term impacts of a gradual rise in temperature over the coming decades are complex and difficult to project with certainty. This poses a particular challenge for developing the political and social consensus necessary for effective policy-making.

The role of local and regional authorities in the climate change challenge is critical. Most of the natural resources (river basins, catchment areas, flood plains) and socio-economic systems (agriculture, tourism, urban structures) that are likely to be affected by climate change in the coming decades are unique to specific local and/or regional areas. While the climate and energy targets adopted by the EU are binding at national level, the behavioural change required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will be guided by local and regional policies and initiatives.

#### Addressing the challenge

**Climate change mitigation** is any action taken to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases which requires improved efficiency in heavily polluting sectors such as energy, transport and agriculture.

**Adaptation to climate change** means understanding future climate change and its specific environmental, social and economic impacts, and taking action on the basis of this understanding to prepare for and adjust to these impacts.

Climate change is complex and difficult to understand for policy-makers, stakeholders and the public. It is also a relatively new policy issue and one that cuts across traditional policymaking sectors. This makes climate change an important area for policy learning and the exchange of experience. Interregional cooperation enables authorities to gain a better understanding of their strengths, opportunities and weaknesses with respect to tackling climate change.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Capitalise on the experience of others from around the EU through the opportunities offered by INTERREG IVC and other EU-wide programmes and projects. There are many proven good practices available, particularly in mechanisms for stakeholder cooperation, planning practices and technical approaches to specific problems.



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## Making the case for climate action

Developing an information base on climate change and making the case for climate action through targeted research and methodologies is seen by many regions as a prerequisite for bridging the gap between the abstract nature of climate change as an issue and the need to design and implement realistic mitigation and adaptation measures.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Join one of the EU initiatives that fosters political commitment to climate change action at the highest levels (e.g. Covenant of Mayors for sustainable energy plans).

## Stakeholder involvement and policy networks

*In the UK, the Planning and Climate Change Coalition led by the Town and Country Planning Association, brings together over 40 organisations from across sectors to develop a consensus on how governments should respond to climate change (GRaBS project) and environmentally friendly approach towards urban planning (POWER project).*

Climate change is by nature a cross-sectoral issue – it impacts energy, transport, water, health, employment and nearly every aspect of local and regional planning and policy-making. As such, it requires trust and effective collaboration across institutions and groups that may not be accustomed to working together. Many regions have developed useful mechanisms for managing cooperation on climate change.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Reach out to a wide range of stakeholders including the scientific and research communities to build a sound, scientific basis for climate change planning and action.

## Strategic and action planning

A strategic approach to tackling climate change is required for regions and local authorities. This includes problem analysis, setting objectives, defining and prioritising actions and responsible actors, and developing the approach to monitoring and evaluation. Regions that have successfully developed climate change plans and planning approaches have much to share with those that are only beginning the process.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Remember that climate change is a cross-cutting issue. When planning new developments, or public spending programmes (including for EU funds), consider both the impact of the development on greenhouse gas emissions and also the potential impact of a changing climate on development or investment objectives.

## Implementation measures

Promoting climate-friendly territorial development in communities can include measures focusing on behavioural change, educational programmes, measures for enhancing climate knowledge in the private sector, etc.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Consider the natural environment, including the role of ecosystem services as a natural buffer against the impacts of climate change, in planning for adaptation to climate change.

*The Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes is a unique model that shows how to fund the management of climate risks. In Spain the model was used to design payments by electric companies to forest associations for wildfire prevention activities, in compensation for the installation of power infrastructure in forests. (F:ACTS! project)*

## Measuring and monitoring progress

The availability of adequate and robust data is essential for monitoring and measuring GHG emissions and assessing the existing situations with regards to climate change.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Improve the development of tools for measuring and monitoring progress on both climate change mitigation and adaptation.