

# A global snapshot of climate change adaption

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## What is climate change adaptation?

Adaptation is about reducing our vulnerability to unavoidable impacts of climate change, like stronger and more frequent heat waves or storms, increased risk of floods.

## Canadian examples of adaptation:

- The City of Vancouver Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (2012) was the first comprehensive adaptation strategy adopted by a Canadian city. It includes amendments to the city's building code bylaw to account for increased risk of flood damage and a push to expand the city's tree canopy to improve storm water management and reduce urban heat island effect.
- The Montreal Borough of Rosemont-La Petite-Patrie is tackling the urban heat island effect through bylaws that expand vegetation coverage, improve roof reflectivity, and reduce waste heat from buildings and vehicles.
- The Halifax Regional Municipality is addressing rising risks of storms and erosion in waterfront buildings through regulations that increase minimum ground floor elevation requirements.



## **Climate change adaptation in the U.S.**

In the United States, progress on climate policy implementation has been slowed by a lack of consensus at the national level on the need or urgency for a government response. In the past few years, however, the Office of the President, under the leadership of President Obama has issued executive orders that set adaptation goals for federal agencies and departments. Research and support from federal agencies like NASA has also helped local governments prepare for impacts of climate change.

## **European examples of adaptation:**

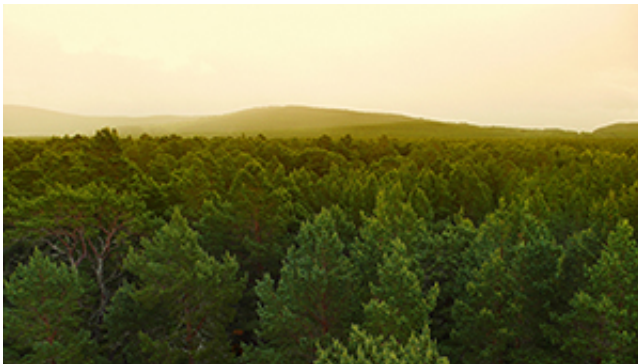
The UK Climate Change Act (2008) set the foundation for UK climate policy, including adaptation. It created a national-level Sub-Committee on Adaptation to provide expert advice on adaptation policy, laid out requirements for a UK Climate Risk Assessment to be carried out every five years, and established reporting powers requiring public service agencies to report on adaptation progress to the Secretary of State. But there has been some backsliding since then.

## **Adaptation backtracking**

- The UK is still a global leader on adaptation, nonetheless the authors observed some backsliding in adaptation commitments between the rounds of reporting to the UN in 2010 and 2014. For example, in 2011 the UK Climate Impacts Programme, which provides vital tools and information on adaptation, was defunded. It continues to exist as a unit at the University of Oxford.
- Slovenia reported the closure of their Government Office on Climate Change in 2012, as well as the suspension of the process that was underway to create a comprehensive national adaptation

plan.

- In Australia, changes in national government party leadership and a subsequent national election in 2013 resulted in the elimination of climate change policy as a portfolio at the ministerial level and the folding of adaptation responsibilities into the general duties of the Ministry of Environment. Other institutions were also dismantled during this period, including the Climate Commission.



## **What it takes to measure adaptation**

A key focus of the UNFCCC negotiations for a post-2015 agreement is enhancing action on adaptation, including the design of more robust monitoring and reporting mechanisms that will help us assess progress on meeting adaptation goals under the Convention.

- Most adaptation research to date has focused on single case studies or countries. The approach that the McGill-led team (TRAC3) is proposing is one of the few available methodologies that enables larger, comparative study of adaptation progress.

This will help researchers identify patterns in adaptation implementation as well as persistent gaps across countries.

- This research will help scientists and policy-makers understand what types of information are still needed to support robust global adaptation monitoring. It can therefore inform conversations about how to design new procedures for adaptation reporting.

## **What scientists don't know – early stages still**

- This methodology is still a first generation effort to answer some of the big questions in adaptation.
- The next generation of tracking metrics will need to better capture adaptation taking place at regional and local levels, as well as adaptation occurring in the private sector.
- Scientists need to gain a stronger understanding of what successful adaptation looks like on the ground so they know what they should be measuring.
- The researchers are continuing to explore questions about why countries implement different types of adaptations and what factors explain why some countries are further ahead than others.

Provided by McGill University

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