

Climate change adaptation in high income countries

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We all know that the climate is changing, but how can we best prepare for some of the changes that lie ahead? Should coastal cities change their building codes to accommodate rising sea levels? Should we allocate more resources to tree-planting to reduce urban heat islands? These are examples of local initiatives that can make a difference to climate change adaptation. Indeed, climate adaptation is a rapidly growing concern for the international community, and one of the key areas to watch coming out of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris conference will be how commitments to adaptation are enhanced under the post-2015 agreement.

But how do we figure out what works?

Because the field is so new (scientists and policy-makers have been testing various initiatives related to climate change adaptation for only about a decade), it is difficult to gain a clear picture at a global scale of who is doing what and how successful these initiatives have been.

A McGill University-led group of researchers, the Tracking Research on Adaptation to Climate Change Consortium (TRAC3) are looking at whether progress is being made in designing policies and initiatives to reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts across countries. Their aim is to contribute new ways of monitoring the global climate adaptation process.

Adapting building codes and monitoring extreme weather

In their latest study, published today in *Nature Climate Change*, the researchers compared data from two rounds of national reporting on adaptation from 41 Annex I Parties to the UNFCCC. These countries largely constitute the world's biggest, and wealthiest, polluters. But there is good news, since the researchers report that between 2010 and 2014, these countries demonstrate that broad progress is being made on adaptation:



- There is an 87% overall increase in climate change adaptation initiatives reported among these nations;
- The greatest increases were in the areas of regulatory actions – e.g. building code changes(139%); surveillance and monitoring of things like heat waves or extreme weather risks (114%); and public awareness and outreach campaigns (101%); and
- The greatest number of initiatives in these high-income countries continue to be in the environment, water and agriculture sectors.

But adaptation policies still leave most vulnerable behind

At the same time the researchers also found that:

- Most vulnerable still at risk. There was no reported progress in meeting the needs of those who are most vulnerable to impacts of climate change, such as low-income individuals, the elderly, and Indigenous communities. This is particularly worrisome because, even in wealthy countries like Canada, the effects of [climate change](#) will be experienced unevenly across different segments of society, and those who are already vulnerable will be more negatively affected by our changing climate.
- Climate change policies can be dismantled. There is evidence of adaptation policy being dismantled in some countries during this period. Countries such as Australia and Slovenia show that stability in adaptation policies and institutions is dependent on

political will at the national level. A change in government following an election, for example, can cause [countries](#) to move from being leaders to being laggards or vice versa very rapidly.

"Identifying these patterns and gaps is crucial for decision-making about where to invest climate financing and other resources so that we have the biggest impact on reducing vulnerability," said alexandra [dot] lesnikowski [at] mail [dot] mcgill [dot] ca (Alexandra Lesnikowski), the first author of the letter published today.

More information: Alexandra Lesnikowski et al. National-level progress on adaptation, *Nature Climate Change* (2015). [DOI: 10.1038/nclimate2863](#)

Provided by McGill University

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