

[We urge the European Commission to develop a new EU climate adaptation strategy](#)



□Climate change is having wide-ranging impacts on ecosystems, economic sectors, human health and well-being in Europe. From 1980 to 2016, the total reported economic losses caused by weather and other climate-related extremes in Europe amounted to over EUR 436 billion, [according to the European Commission](#). In this interview, [Markku Markkula \(FI/EPP\)](#) answers four questions on climate adaptation. The Chair of Espoo City Board and President of the Helsinki Region is the rapporteur of a [draft opinion on climate adaptation](#) to be adopted at the [next plenary session](#) of the European Committee of the Regions on 8, 9 and 10 December 2020.

Does Europe need a more ambitious EU Adaptation Strategy to tackle current and future challenges? What are some key areas where we need to raise the bar for adaptation?

Activities related to tackling climate adaptation and mitigation need to be integrated. Not either or, but both. Political leadership should treat climate change as an emergency that needs to be tackled collectively with joint standardised innovative measures; and also globally, by breaking down silos and barriers. Europe should be the global leader and forerunner in creating and using innovative measures to combat and adapt to global warming. This means raising the climate ambition bar much higher than the EU is discussing today.

Specifically on adaptation, we certainly welcome the [blueprint](#) for a new EU strategy on adaptation to climate change. However, we now urge the European Commission to develop a more ambitious EU Adaptation Strategy in line with the principles of active subsidiarity and proportionality, recognising the crucial role that cities and regions play in climate adaptation and providing them with the tools necessary to develop territory-based solutions. We certainly need to act on specific key areas, starting with integrating climate adaptation as a crosscutting priority in territorial planning and management. Other priority areas to improve are the emissions trading system ([ETS](#)), the effort-sharing decision ([ESD](#)) on emissions reduction, and land use, land-use change and forestry ([LULUCF](#)). In addition, we need to substantially increase financing tools for climate adaptation and mitigation projects, step up cross-border cooperation and exchanges of experience and best practices, and enhance resilience and adaptation capacities, nature-based solutions and opportunities for innovation.

The COVID pandemic has shown the level of vulnerability of our societies to infectious diseases, and some scientists have highlighted the potential links between pandemics, nature protection and climate change. Do you think that adaptation to climate change can be more closely related to health

protection?

Health in the EU member states has never been better than now, but climate change threatens the achievements of past decades. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the EU and all levels of governance must do much more, and that there is a pressing need to act fast and to act together. I invite you to have a look at the newly published [report](#) on urban adaptation by the European Environment Agency. Let me take a small example from that: assuming current levels of vulnerability and no additional climate adaptation measures, annual fatalities from extreme heat could rise from 2,700 deaths/year now to approximately 30,000 or 50,000 by 2050, with 1.5 °C or 2 °C global warming, respectively. This is a real threat, and we need to do everything to avoid it.

Where can Europe's regions and cities most contribute to adaptation to climate change?

No adaptation policy will work unless it takes into account the needs, views and expertise of regions and cities. Local and regional governments are responsible for more than 70% of climate mitigation, and that percentage goes up to 90% when considering climate adaptation actions. Cities are already showing frontrunner commitment and leadership. It is [estimated](#) that around 40% of European cities with more than 150,000 inhabitants have already adopted climate adaptation plans. At the European Committee of the Regions, we are committed to continue that path and we expect the European Green Deal to accelerate action and demonstrate what is required to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030 or, at least, well before 2050. In my region, Helsinki, we have recently approved a new [roadmap to achieve carbon neutrality by 2035](#). Our ambition is high, but, as the roadmap shows, our targets are achievable.

Everywhere in Europe, we should focus on capturing the full potential of collaborative resilience-building and make sure that sub-national levels have the capacity to react fast. Emergency and rescue services are the most important when operating at the front line. We therefore need more knowledge, improved capabilities and adequate financial resources at the local and regional level if we are to adapt effectively to climate change.

What is the role of adaptation action in the localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals?

Adaptation policies should play a fundamental role in the localisation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainability should be the 'new normal' for all communities, businesses and individuals including budgeting processes. A good way to proceed, also in climate adaptation, would be to prepare Voluntary Local Review (VLR) reports on how cities and regions are implementing the SDGs. These are excellent instruments for use in learning and increasing effectiveness on the ground through collaboration and the exchange of best practices. An excellent example is the one coming from my city, Espoo, which delivered a [comprehensive VLR report](#) to the UN that demonstrated in practical terms how to accelerate sustainable policies on the ground, through working together and while leaving no one behind.

Press Contact:

pressecdr@cor.europa.eu