

Regional vulnerability to climate change and the role of cohesion policy in climate change adaptation

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Climate change is happening and this is why the need for both mitigation and adaptation has become obvious. Therefore, the European Union and its regional policy should take heed of this problem on any account. EU cohesion policy is one of the climate-change-associated policy areas which are already trying to put in place measures and investments that help Member States and regions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in order to strengthen regional competitiveness and foster cohesion.

Climate change will cause several impacts on European regions, adverse ones as well as beneficial. The impacts will be unequally distributed across Europe, affecting some regions more than others with both positive and negative effects, whereas less developed regions are often less able to cope with impacts than more developed regions. The unfavourable effects of climate change are likely to change socio-economic patterns and exacerbate existing inequalities, thus critically challenging national governments and climate change action at regional level. Since the aggravation of socio-economic inequalities counteracts the cohesion policy's objectives of improving economic, social and territorial cohesion and reducing regional disparities, cohesion policy must take the influence of climate change into account in future policies. Concretely, cohesion policy should on the one hand support projects aiming for climate change adaptation and on the other hand consider regional vulnerabilities when allocating its funds. Within the ESPON Climate project "Climate change and territorial effects on regions and local economies", a pan-European vulnerability assessment has been carried out, which can serve as a basis for tailor-made, evidence-based adaptation options. In addition the results of the vulnerability assessment could also support cohesion policy.

This paper highlights the need for cohesion policy to take account of climate change and its diverse impacts. The illustration of how cohesion policy currently deals with climate change aspects will show potential positive efforts and weak points. The role of adaptive capacity will also be pointed out. Cohesion Policy as well as existing efforts to adapt to climate change will then exemplarily be closer examined in the Italian Veneto region, a region that is both, competitive in economic terms, but highly vulnerable in climate change terms, especially in regard to sea level rise and river floods. Therefore the emphasis lies on flood risk reduction measures. Finally policy implications will be formulated by opposing current and planned political strategies and regulations to actual required policies in order to highlight the points which require improvement.