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ENHANCING VERTICAL GOVERNANCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION IN THE ALPINE SPACE, THROUGH MANDATORY MAINSTREAMING, MULTI-LEVEL COORDINATION, AND CRITERIA- DRIVEN FUNDING

AG8 – Risk Governance

Shaping future together

The following Policy Recommendations have been elaborated by the members of the Actions Groups of EUSALP, reflect the expertise of the AGs members and are meant for voluntary implementation by the decision makers when it comes to the Alpine Region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In light of the **still fragmented vertical governance, lack of political continuity, and weak integration of adaptation criteria into regulatory frameworks** to effectively address the pressing and increasingly severe impacts of climate change, we **call on policymakers** at all levels (particularly EU and regional ones) to enhance **integration between the different levels of vertical governance in the field of climate change adaptation**.

Regional authorities are best placed to implement tailored adaptation measures in line with EU and national criteria, so we urge policymakers to make climate change adaptation procedures mandatory in regional development strategies and sectoral plans. This should be supported by multi-level governance, with dedicated coordinated bodies, and resources for adaptation. This could also be achieved by implementing additional climate change adaptation criteria in regional funding programmes applicable at EU, national and regional levels.

INTRODUCTION

Policy Objective

The aim of these policy recommendations is to **strengthen vertical governance** (meant as the interactions between different governance levels, such as Municipalities, Regions, States) and the **effective implementation of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA)** in the Alpine region by **enhancing the strategic role of regional authorities**. This involves embedding CCA into regional development planning through mandatory mainstreaming, the establishment of robust multi-level governance frameworks, and the application of adaptation-specific criteria at regional level in funding schemes.

Challenges to Be Tackled

The **Alpine region is experiencing increasingly severe and spatially uneven impacts from climate change**, including rising temperatures, altered precipitation regimes, glacier retreat, thawing of permafrost, and a growing frequency and intensity of extreme events and associated hazards such as floods, landslides, and droughts. **Despite** the growing awareness and elaboration of **EU and national climate policies** (e.g., the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, National Adaptation Strategies and Plans), **their operationalization at the regional level remains fragmented**, with some regions having not elaborated them yet. Key barriers include:

- Fragmentation of governance structures, competencies and responsibilities across different vertical administrative levels.
- Limited formal mechanisms of internal vertical coordination (within countries) and of cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation.
- Lack of political support and continuity in adaptation mandate and implementation of measures.
- Weak integration of adaptation criteria into regulatory, training, and funding frameworks.
- Insufficient level of stakeholder participation and inclusion in CCA planning processes.

Territorial Dimension

Regional authorities play a relevant role within the Alpine region as interface between EU and national strategies and local-level implementation. They are **best positioned to implement adaptation measures**, which need to be **tailored to the local context**, according to local ecological, socio-economic, and cultural specificities while ensuring alignment with broader policy frameworks.

Alpine Space

Existing Policy Framework and Need for Intervention

A wide range of EU and national frameworks support adaptation efforts, including the **EU Climate Adaptation Strategy, the European Green Deal, the EU Mission on Adaptation, and National Adaptation Strategies and Plans** in countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, and Slovenia. Additionally, the **Alpine Convention's Climate Action Plan 2.0** and the **EU Territorial Agenda 2030** emphasize the importance of place-based, climate-friendly and climate resilient approaches to adaptation. However, implementation remains uneven and often lacks specificity regarding the territory concerned. The **integration of CCA into key programming documents** at European¹ but also national and regional level is **sometimes non-binding and insufficiently detailed or mainstreamed**, resulting in limited traction at the regional and local level. A **targeted intervention** is therefore **required to reinforce the governance, finance, and operational capacities of regions** to translate high-level strategies into **concrete, multi-sectoral and context-relevant adaptation actions**.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: Provisions for mainstreaming climate adaptation should be established for regional development and sectoral strategies in the Alpine region. This can be achieved also by setting measurable CCA targets in sectoral plans to ensure that adaptation efforts continue despite political changes.

Proposed Actions [Actors responsible²]:

1. Legal Mandate & Regulatory Framework

- Enact national or regional laws requiring **all regional development and spatial plans to be coherent with the climate risk assessment and adaptation objectives** defined in the regional adaptation plan or strategy [NL, RL].
- **Mandate alignment between regional (when available) and national adaptation strategies and plans**, as well as with EU frameworks (e.g., EU Adaptation Strategy, Green Deal) [NL, RL].
- Define minimum adaptation planning requirements and standards to harmonize across Alpine regions [EU, EUSALP].

2. CCA actions with Measurable Targets

- Require each regional development plan to include dedicated **CCA actions, anchored in the Regional Adaptation Plans/Strategies** [EU, NL] with:
 - Sectoral priorities (e.g., water, land use, health, mobility).
 - Time-bound and spatially explicit objectives.
 - Indicators and baseline data.
 - A regular performance review.

3. Institutional Embedding & Process Integration

- Mainstream **CCA into existing sectoral and cross-sectoral legislation at all policy levels** (e.g., by fully integrating CCA into environmental assessment procedures) [NL, RL].
- Define **institutional responsibilities across departments and levels** (technical, political, participatory) and establish coordination bodies for cross-sectoral actions [RL].

Beneficiaries: Regional managing authorities, local Municipalities, local communities.

¹ Such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund, the EU Social Fund Plus, EU4Health, EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

² EU=European Union level, EUSALP=EUSALP level, NL=national level, RL=regional level, LL=local level

Alpine Space

R2: A multi-level participatory governance framework should be institutionalised to promote collaboration and resource sharing from EU to the local level.

Proposed Actions:

1. Dedicated Regional Coordination Bodies

- **Set up Regional Climate Change Adaptation Boards** under the authority of **regional governments** (e.g., good practice: Trentino Provincial Board for Coordination and Action on CC), which may include a technical board, a scientific advisory board and a stakeholder forum. They can contribute to drafting, implementing, monitoring, and revising Regional Adaptation Plans/Strategies, sectoral CCA actions, **liaise with national and local levels**, as well as stakeholder/interest groups, support mainstreaming across sectors [NL, RL].

2. National-Regional Coordination Mechanisms

- **Institutionalize regular joint sessions** between the **Regional CCA Boards and National Climate Observatories/Ministries** or Coordination Offices (e.g., good practice: Climate-neutral Federal Administration Coordination Office in D) [NL, RL].
- Create a **shared policy dashboard for monitoring the alignment** of National Adaptation Plans/Strategies' objectives with regional planning processes. [NL, RL].

3. Alpine-Wide Governance Architecture

- Exploit already existing networks (e.g., the **Alpine Convention and EUSALP AGs**) to engage national CCA Observatories, Regional CCA Boards representatives, and Alpine stakeholders to **convene joint councils on CCA** [RL, EUSALP].
- Link to EU Adaptation Mission governance (e.g., reporting alignment, mutual learning) [EU].

4. Capacity-Building and Resource Sharing Instruments

- Launch **intermunicipal cooperation models** (e.g., good practice: KLARI! in A) for **knowledge exchange** and **pooled implementation** (especially for small municipalities) [RL, LL].
- Provide training, **Alpine Adaptation toolkits**, **good practice portfolios**, (interregional) exchange formats (e.g., good practice: EU TAIEX format) and **open data platforms** for adaptation planning and standardize practices [EU, EUSALP, NL].
- Further enhance the use of **Interreg, LIFE and national co-financing** to support **shared technical staff** or centralized procurement [RL].

Beneficiaries: Regional climate officers, local authorities, local communities

R3: Additional regional criteria for CCA should be set for EU funding programmes (e.g., EAFRD, ERDF, Just Transition), as well as national and regional funding lines, and respective reporting requirements to ensure that projects align with adaptation goals and that effective transformative climate adaptation is prioritised.

Proposed Actions:

1. Design of CCA Criteria Framework

- **Define a set of regional adaptation-relevant funding criteria**, applicable across EU, National and Regional funding lines (e.g., EAFRD, ERDF, Just Transition). Categories may include, when relevant [RL]:
 - Exposure reduction (e.g., flood-safe siting).
 - Nature-based adaptation (e.g., agroecology, green infrastructure).
 - Alignment with regional/national adaptation strategies/plans.
 - Adaptive co-benefits (e.g., soil health, water retention).
 - Climate risk assessment included in design ("climate proofing").

- Social benefits (e.g. reducing inequalities) and transformative potential.
- Synergies with Climate Mitigation and SDG's.
- Link CCA regional criteria to **EU Taxonomy alignment** and Just Transition principles [RL].

2. Scoring and Eligibility Rules

- **Set minimum adaptation compliance requirements** for all project types above a funding threshold [EU, NL, RL].
- Make **CCA criteria** a **screening condition** during pre-evaluation (non-compliant projects not admitted) [EU, NL, RL].

3. Monitoring, Reporting and Feedback

- **Include adaptation indicators** (e.g., area protected, vulnerability or exposure reduction metrics, co-benefits) in **reporting templates** [EU, NL, RL].
- Use lessons learned to adjust criteria iteratively in next programming cycles [RL, EU].
- Include regional adaptation performance in EU Managing Authorities' reporting to EU bodies (e.g. DG REGIO) [EU].

Beneficiaries: Regional managing authorities, project developers and local governments, local communities.

Anticipated Impacts:

EU-level	National level	Regional level	Local level
<i>Effectiveness and continuity of Climate Change Adaptation in the Alpine region by fostering a coherent, multi-level governance approach.</i>	<i>CCA as a structural element of strategic development planning, less exposed to political turnover.</i>	<i>A more stable framework for long-term planning, supported by measurable targets and regular reviews.</i>	<i>Exploitation of pooled resources and skills, reduction of costs, more inclusive participation and trust.</i>
<i>Financial support is directed towards projects with clear CCA benefits, linking investment decisions to measurable adaptation outcomes.</i>	<i>Better use of financial resources, reduction of climate-related risks, lowering of recovery costs, and increasing of investment in green infrastructure and climate services.</i>	<i>More efficient and climate resilient (in the long term) sectoral planning, programming and implementation of activities.</i>	<i>More resilient and climate-adapted communities in the long term.</i>

IMPLEMENTATION

Key overarching enablers:

- Clear horizontal and vertical responsibilities and roles.
- Efficient monitoring and evaluation systems to enable adaptation of policy processes and learnings.
- Inclusion of public authorities, private sector, civil society, and scientific communities in adaptation planning and implementation to build ownership, legitimacy and support.
- Effective communication and awareness-raising strategies for decision-makers at all levels about climate change and adaptation necessities.

Alpine Space

1st Policy recommendation

Enablers:

- Technical assistance, seed grants and peer-learning offered by the EU Mission on Climate Change Adaptation and Interreg Alpine Space.
- The existing Strategic Environmental Assessment/Environmental Impact Assessment procedures and the EU Taxonomy, which already oblige planners to consider climate risk.
- Shared data sources such as the CAPA platform, Climate-ADAPT and Copernicus, which give every region free access to comparable climate-risk information.
- EUSALP's Action Group 8 and the Alpine Convention could offer peer-review opportunities and methodological guidelines.
- Each region will need a small, permanent *CCA-mainstreaming unit* and start-up budget to update risk studies, train sectoral staff and develop a CCA toolkit.

2nd Policy recommendation

Enablers:

- EUSALP could support benchmarking progress across the macro-region.
- National Climate Observatories/Ministries or Coordination Offices can ensure consistency among Regional CCA Boards.
- Inter-municipal platforms such as Austria's KLAR! can foster knowledge exchange and pool implementation, with the results of increasing consistency between national adaptation strategies/plans and the various regional strategies.

3rd Policy recommendation

Enablers:

- Managing Authorities for ERDF, EAFRD, the Just Transition Fund and similar instruments could lead to designing the scoring grids, while the CCA-mainstreaming unit and the RCAB could validate the technical soundness of criteria.
- National finance ministries and DG REGIO ensure that the new requirements fit into EU regulations.
- Funding managing authorities could code the new criteria into their tender platforms, open a helpdesk (FAQs, webinars) for applicants, and make the continuous monitoring of adaptation indicators the trigger for improving each subsequent programming cycle.

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