

First assessment of the EU's 2021 Adaptation Strategy

24 February 2021

Today, the European Commission adopted a new [EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](#), with the objective of setting out the pathway to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change. While it is imperative that the EU steps up its action to mitigate climate change, the EU must also get ready to face the already unavoidable consequences of the climate crisis.

There is a clear human, environmental and economic imperative to significantly and rapidly improve adaptation measures. A recent [JRC PESETA IV study](#) confirmed this necessity by analysing the effects of some (but not all, the real impacts are likely to be even more severe) climate change impact categories in a warming scenario of 3°C or more above pre-industrial levels, without adaptation action. Deaths from extreme heat in the EU and UK would rise at least 30-fold to 90,000 annual deaths. Ecosystems will also be severely affected with e.g. the alpine tundra practically disappearing in the Pyrenees and being reduced by 84% overall. Financial losses from coastal flooding alone would constitute €250 billion/year in 2100.

Overall, the EEB welcomes the adoption of a new EU Adaptation Strategy and its focus on nature-based solutions, synergies with biodiversity and nature restoration, water management and the fact that adaptation is recognised as a priority in the recovery from Covid-19. It is truly disappointing, however, that the new Adaptation Strategy fails to set out concrete, measurable and time-bound targets for the EU and Member States to become climate resilient. This is in contradiction to the clear [call from the European Parliament](#) for binding and quantifiable targets and the [prior commitment](#) by the Commission to propose a legally binding instrument should progress on the 2013 Strategy be insufficient.

It is difficult to understand how the aim to "[shift the focus from understanding the problem to developing solutions, and to move from planning to implementation](#)" will be met without setting legally binding targets and specific measures. Instead of committing to concrete steps with clear deadlines over the next years, the Commission mostly promises to 'promote', 'support', 'explore', 'continue to incentivise' or 'help'. Where there are commitments to 'establish' and 'develop' tools, these are remarkably vague, contain no deadlines or further details as to how they will be achieved.

Concrete and legally binding measures are necessary to ensure that climate adaptation is recognised as a political priority and is implemented across the EU and sectors. This would contribute to similar levels of protection against extreme weather events and other effects of the climate crisis for people across the EU. Vague voluntary promises further exacerbate existing inequalities and differences in opportunities across the EU as will be particularly felt by younger and future generations.

Please see the below table for a more detailed assessment of the Strategy against our key asks.

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RPM Tribunal de l'entreprise francophone de Bruxelles

How does the Adaptation Strategy perform against our key asks?

EEB recommendation	Rank	Justification
Set binding and measurable targets, reflecting an increase in ambition and that progress on the objectives of the 2013 Adaptation Strategy has been insufficient.		No legally binding targets or commitments to develop binding targets are set in the Strategy, no timeline, no measurable targets, fails to ensure the shift from understanding of impacts to implementation of solutions.
Establish a strong monitoring and review process with clear assessment indicators, informed by science, to ensure the proper implementation of the Strategy.		As there are no concrete targets, there is also no clear monitoring and review process – this means no framework to ensure the implementation of the Strategy.
Focus on nature-based solutions, especially synergies with targets in the EU Biodiversity Strategy, including on nature protection and restoration for biodiversity and climate.		The promotion of nature-based solution and the financial aspects thereof is welcome, yet there are no concrete targets associated with the promises and opportunity to achieve strong synergies with the EU Biodiversity Strategy seems not to be seized.
Achieve climate-resilient, sustainable use and management of water by improving water allocation as well as the enforcement of the Water Framework Directive (WFD).		Recognition of threats to water availability and quality, the need to reduce water, coordination of resource allocation and water permits are positive, but must be complemented by the proper enforcement of the WFD.
Recognise climate adaptation as a priority for the post Covid-19 green recovery, make available EU funding for climate adaptation and reform subsidies to support adaptation measures		The specific mention of adaptation for the 37% of the Recovery and Resilience Plans for climate action is welcome, yet additional funding based on the polluter pays principle is missing.
Require better mainstreaming of adaptation across all sectors and policies, especially agriculture, water, forestry, fisheries, building sector, renovation and spatial planning		While the strategy recognises the need to mainstream adaptation and refers to a range of sectors, it does not contain more concrete proposals for how to achieve this.