



# POLICY BRIEF

1/2025

Adapt, Europe, Adapt!



**Tomáš PETŘÍČEK**

# POLICY BRIEF

**W**ith Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement and his ambitious fossil fuel program, it became increasingly clear that the global effort to combat climate change was riddled with challenges – much like a slice of Emmental cheese, full of holes. Climate decline is no longer a distant threat; it is already here, manifesting in severe weather events, rising sea levels, and shifting ecosystems. Adaptation is not just necessary; it must become the centerpiece of our response.

However, the path forward is complicated by a rising green backlash. Across Europe and other parts of the world, voices opposing the green transition are growing louder. Many people are legitimately anxious about its impact on their economic and social standards, as well as their way of life. While the European Union (EU) remains committed to innovation and support for green technologies, a more urgent issue is emerging: adaptation to the inevitable impacts of climate change.

## THE CASE FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION

This is precisely the moment when we need to pivot toward a more pragmatic strategy—one that is oriented on building our society's resilience to risks and shocks of climate change and is implemented in a way that empowers people, households, and communities through social and economic improvements of their livelihood. Focusing on adaptation does not mean giving up on climate mitigation. On the contrary, green technologies will continue to advance, fuelled by the substantial investments already made. Here, we will most likely acknowledge other pressing concerns, particularly the health of the European population, which remains threatened by pollution.

Where to start with? At the core of our adaptation strategy must be water. If climate mitigation is about access to clean energy, climate adaptation is largely about managing water—both as a resource and as a risk factor. Climate change is expected to exacerbate problems with water supplies, affecting numerous sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and key industries, as well as electricity production. Additionally, the risks of floods, droughts, and threats to coastal areas will rise.

The quality of water is also at stake. Climate change, coupled with existing issues such as pesticide use, chemical pollution, and microplastics, will require significant efforts and investments to ensure that Europeans continue to have access to safe drinking water. Failure to address this issue could have severe public health implications.

## REGIONAL AND URBAN CHALLENGES

Climate adaptation strategies must also account for regional disparities. Among the regions most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are mountain areas. These regions are heavily dependent on winter tourism, which is increasingly threatened by unpredictable snowfall patterns. However, tourism is not the only sector at risk. Mountain ecosystems, known for their sensitivity to climate fluctuations, face broader environmental and economic challenges. Forestry, a vital part of local economies, may suffer from shifting temperature and precipitation patterns, leading to changes in tree species and productivity. Traditional agricultural practices, which often depend on specific climate conditions, could also be disrupted, threatening the unique cultural and economic fabric of these regions. Without strategic adaptation efforts, the socio-economic consequences for mountain communities could be severe and long-lasting.



Urban areas are not immune to climate impacts. European cities, many of which are already grappling with heatwaves and air pollution, will face heightened health risks, particularly for aging populations. Urban adaptation measures must be accelerated to protect public health and ensure that cities remain livable.

## **CLIMATE ADAPTATION AND EU CLIMATE DIPLOMACY**

The EU's role in global climate diplomacy must also prioritize adaptation. While helping global partners develop without exacerbating climate change remains essential, more and more countries will require support to protect their populations from the immediate impacts of climate change. This is particularly true for regions such as the Mediterranean, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia.

Adaptation should become an integral part of the EU's Global Gateway initiative. As the U.S. retreats from international climate leadership, the EU has an opportunity to step in, demonstrating its autonomy and ambition to play a relevant role on the world stage. Water management is one sector where the EU still holds competitive advantages, and leveraging this expertise could strengthen its global influence.

## **THE URGENT NEED FOR A NEW EU CLIMATE ADAPTATION STRATEGY**

The European Union (EU) is preparing to present a comprehensive Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2026, building upon previous initiatives to enhance resilience against the unavoidable impacts of climate change. This forthcoming strategy aims to integrate and expand upon existing efforts, such as the Water Resilience Strategy expected in the second quarter of 2025, to create a cohesive and effective approach to adaptation.

To ensure the success of this strategy, it is imperative to prioritize several key areas:

### **1. Learning from Past Initiatives**

The EU must critically assess previous strategies, such as the Green Deal, to identify and rectify past shortcomings. This involves translating high-level adaptation goals into actionable sector-specific plans, investment frameworks, and economic instruments. By doing so, the strategy can foster industrial and sectoral programs that leverage the economic potential of adaptation, delivering tangible benefits to European citizens.

### **2. Inclusive and Participatory Adaptation Efforts**

Engaging communities and local stakeholders is crucial for tailoring solutions to regional needs. Bottom-up approaches, which involve local entities in decision-making processes, are essential for building resilience at the community level. This inclusivity ensures that adaptation measures are relevant, effective, and supported by those they impact.

### **3. Investment in Research and Innovation**

Advancing research and innovation is vital for developing new technologies and practices in climate adaptation. This includes improvements in water management, urban planning, and agricultural techniques. By prioritizing innovation, the EU can stay ahead of emerging challenges and implement effective adaptation solutions.

### **4. Enhancing Knowledge and Data Accessibility**

Making adaptation smarter involves improving the availability and accessibility of data on climate impacts and adaptation solutions. Robust data and risk assessment tools should be accessible to all stakeholders, from policymakers to businesses and citizens, to inform effective adaptation actions.

## 5. Accelerating Adaptation Actions

Swift adaptation requires expediting planning and implementation processes. This includes integrating climate resilience considerations into all relevant policies and promoting immediate action to address pressing climate risks.

## 6. Systemic Integration of Adaptation Measures

A systemic approach ensures that adaptation is embedded across all sectors and levels of governance. This comprehensive integration is crucial for building a climate-resilient society. EU needs to create strong connections between individual EU sectoral plans as well as integrate better EU-level actions with the Member States' strategies. In addition, the whole-of-society approach needs to be employed.

## 7. Strengthening International Collaboration

The EU should enhance international action on adaptation by promoting sub-national, national, and regional approaches globally, with a specific focus on regions like Africa and Small Island Developing States. This global perspective not only aids vulnerable regions but also reinforces the EU's leadership in climate resilience.

By prioritizing these areas, the EU's 2026 Climate Adaptation Strategy can effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change, ensuring a resilient and sustainable future for all member states.

## CONCLUSION

*We stand at a crossroads. The need for climate adaptation is undeniable, and the consequences of failure are too severe to contemplate. By learning from the past and adopting a focused, pragmatic approach, the EU can lead the way in building a resilient future. Adaptation is not a concession; it is a necessity—and it is an opportunity to protect and enhance the lives of European citizens while reinforcing the EU's position as a global leader. The time to act is now.*

**Tomáš Petříček, Ph.D.**  
Director

---

**Progressive Analytical Centre** is an independent think-tank providing evidence-based solutions and proposals for progressive policy-making. The Centre supports the exchange of views between experts, interdisciplinary dialogue, and engagement with the general public both in the Czech Republic as well as in the European Union. It contributes to improving our understanding of key social, political, and economic trends through critical analysis, policy-oriented research, and awareness-raising. Among the main research and analytical interests belong to the future of the European economy and industry, climate change and energy policy, social justice, international solidarity, security, and societal resilience. The Centre is based in Prague and launched its activities in 2021.

*Progressivní analytické centrum, o. p. s. is a legal person - a public benefit corporation established in accordance with the law of the Czech Republic, Person Identification Number: 03527531, with its registered office at Salvátorská 931/8, Staré Město, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic, registered in the Register of Public Benefit Corporations maintained by the Municipal Court in Prague, Section O, Insert 1361.*





Progresivní  
analytické  
centrum

**PAC**

***Progresivní analytické centrum, o. p. s.***

*<https://progresivnicentrum.eu/>*

**FEBRUARY 2025**