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# How does Policy Stack Up?

An assessment of Northern Ireland's national climate adaptation policies

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Even if we stop all Greenhouse emissions today, we have now locked in some degree of climate change, with associated shocks and impacts that we cannot avoid. Climate Adaptation is the process of preparing for those impacts, and increasing resilience in a way that brings multiple benefits for Northern Ireland's communities, economy and nature.

*In this summary for policy-makers and practitioners, the EPA-funded Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TALX) project team identifies the barriers and enablers of climate adaptation and assesses national policy against these, highlighting specific areas where Northern Ireland is neglecting to meet its policy ambitions, and how it must improve.*

## Key Messages

The TALX project has identified five key principles which are central to the development of good quality adaptation policy. Despite making progress in certain aspects, (this was undertaken before the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 came into law), Northern Ireland is not fully addressing any of the principles. Across all areas, policy has either failed to acknowledge essential criteria for adaptation, or has not provided resource for implementation. Important messages in the Northern Irish context, for each theme, are highlighted below:

- 1. Stakeholder engagement:** Representative stakeholder engagement is a fundamental feature of good quality adaptation planning, especially for difficult decisions which require local buy-in. None of the structures that currently exist, enable the breadth and depth of engagement required.
- 2. Policy and Governance:** Northern Ireland has been lacking in ambition to improve climate adaptation in the past, with no underpinning legislation, and no monitoring and evaluation framework. With the introduction of the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022, some elements of this will have changed. However, governance structures still largely promote siloed working, and the lack of resources for cross-sector and multi-level collaboration mean that issues of justice and equity are not adequately being addressed. A lack of resource for implementation has also hindered the emergence of climate adaptation leaders and this has impacted on action at local scales, which requires stakeholder input and support to be successful.
- 3. Resource:** Northern Irish policy fails to acknowledge the scale of required staff resource and financing for climate adaptation, something which has a knock on effect on capacity building, obtaining evidence and communicating it to stakeholders. Doing nothing is the most expensive, and worst option. However, without clear government understanding and plans which acknowledge the scale of the financial cost of implementing adaptation measures, policy goals will never be reached and the adaptation gap will continue to grow.
- 4. Decision-making:** Successful adaptation at all levels is underpinned by good decision-making, however, the skills, resources and guidance needed to assess and decide on adaptation options in an equitable manner are currently not acknowledged in national level policy. This has a knock on effect, and sets the standard for sub-national policy as well, increasing the likelihood of inequity and maladaptation in Northern Ireland.
- 5. Mainstreaming:** Policy acknowledges that adaptation should become part of the 'business-as-usual', but there is still a large adaptation gap in Northern Ireland. Climate adaptation and mitigation are not often acknowledged in policy as needing to be addressed simultaneously. There is a major gap in both how adaptation is perceived by society, and a significant lack of sustainable adaptation initiatives currently being implemented across Northern Ireland.

# Recommendations

To achieve successful and effective climate adaptation, we recommend policy-makers and practitioners should:

1. **Incentivise place-based adaptation partnerships<sup>1</sup>** to move away from siloed working and promote cross-sector and multi-level collaboration. Place-based adaptation partnerships (e.g. Eastside Partnership) are an excellent tool that can bring a wide range of stakeholders together to address common risks and opportunities in their locality. By advertising and funding locally-led partnerships and initiatives, the government can support capacity building and encourage ownership of adaptation action among stakeholders.
2. **Adaptation needs to move beyond short-term project and political cycles.** Northern Ireland needs to begin developing long-term and self-sustaining adaptation initiatives. Policymaking can support a pipeline of adaptation projects that will have social and economic co-benefits affecting real and meaningful change in society.
3. **Establish opportunities for dialogue** at both a local and national scale with representative stakeholders to establish strong cross-community relationships and build trust. Ensure feedback is meaningfully integrated into subsequent

adaptation policies and actions, to support systemic change.

4. **Ensure transparent monitoring, evaluation and learning are embedded in adaptation activity** at all levels, so that there is a process for continual improvement. Mandate and support the reporting of adaptation progress for sectors and local authorities on regular cycles and promote and reward examples of practical and innovative climate action solutions that prioritise mitigation and adaptation co-benefits.
5. **Map climate impacts** alongside existing regional data such as health and inequity information to see where the highest vulnerabilities lie. Use these maps to aid decision-making and develop and prioritise adaptation solutions that will increase the resilience of the most vulnerable stakeholders and communities and minimise inequity and injustice in society.
6. **Communicate and co-develop adaptation actions** with those they are intended to benefit to increase support and avoid maladaptation<sup>2</sup>. Engage with a wide range of local stakeholders throughout the adaptation process, and use tailored communication to ensure awareness and understanding of initiatives.

## Detailed Results

You can find a breakdown of the exact criteria used to assess National Adaptation Policy on the next page, listed under the 5 headings from the 'key messages' section above. These criteria were decided upon after a comprehensive literature review of international good practice in climate adaptation by the TALX team and validated by an expert panel of practitioners and policy-makers, using the Delphi approach. More information on how the TALX team arrived at these conclusions and how some of these recommendations can be carried out is now available on the Transboundary Adaptation Learning Exchange (TALX) website ([www.talx.ie](http://www.talx.ie)), where the TALX project has developed a framework to support place-based adaptation partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> *Place-based Adaptation Partnerships - formed from cross-sectoral and multi-level collaborations to support adaptation in a particular area*

<sup>2</sup> *Maladaptation – when climate adaptation actions have unintended negative consequences*

Table 1: The criteria used to assess national climate adaptation policy (Blue: Acknowledged in policy with resources provided, Amber: Acknowledged in policy without resources provided, Red: Not acknowledged in policy; Split Colours: Criteria has changed since the completion of the Assessment)

Factor	Sub-factor	Code	Criteria	Rating
Stakeholder Engagement	Stakeholder Engagement	S1	Representative stakeholder involvement throughout the entire climate adaptation process, from the creation of adaptation policy to the implementation and evaluation of adaptation plans	Amber
		S2	A dedicated process in place to facilitate inclusive stakeholder involvement in the preparation of adaptation policies	Amber
Policy and Governance	National Policy	P1	A central administration body officially in charge of adaptation policy making	Blue
		P2	A national climate adaptation policy	Blue
		P3	Country level legislation in place to underpin adaptation policy (including frameworks and strategies etc.)	Red
		P4	Independent monitoring and evaluation of national policy	Split Colours
	Leadership & Co-ordination of Roles and Responsibilities	P5	Horizontal (cross-sectoral) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, with division of responsibilities and SMART objectives and the alignment of policies	Amber
		P6	Vertical (multi-level) coordination mechanisms exist within the governance system, enabling all levels of administration from local to national to influence policy making	Amber
		P7	Creation of spaces for leaders of climate adaptation to emerge across scales	Amber
		P8	Climate adaptation is scalable, able to be tailored to different levels	Red
		P9	Transparent climate finance with regards to adaptation initiatives	Red
		P10	Transboundary cooperation (either existing or planned) to work together to address common challenges with other countries	Blue
	Climate Justice and Equity	P11	Domestic justice and equity issues (economic, social, environmental and cultural), relevant to each country, are recognised in national-level climate change policy and implementation (e.g. through decision-making)	Red
		P12	Processes are in place to allow actions to reduce any identified differences and/or ensure the benefits of interventions accrue to the most vulnerable	Red
		P13	Climate adaptation policy development, implementation and review is fully transparent	Red
Resource	Staff and Financing	R1	Appropriate financing (enough to cover the cost of policy actions) is being applied to climate adaptation to achieve policy goals at all levels of governance	Red
		R2	Accessible long-term and self-sustaining resources are available to support policy goals at increasing climate resilience (i.e. funding, infrastructure, human resources)	Amber
	Capacity Building and understanding the capability of decision-makers and action takers	R3	Policy supports education, empowerment and engagement of stakeholders at all levels of decision making and action taking in relation to adaptation	Amber
		R4	Mechanisms exist to recruit and train practitioners with the specific skills required to undertake complex climate adaptation	Amber
	Information and Data	R5	The policy supports advances in scientific research to improve understanding and inform decision-making	Amber
		R6	Guidance for how to employ climate adaptation information is provided at sub-national levels	Amber
	Communication and Guidance	R7	Communication and engagement strategies included within the policy that utilize multiple platforms in order to reach diverse stakeholders	Amber
		R8	Recognition within the policy that climate change is an international issue and that adaptation strategies must look beyond national boundaries (i.e. the policy ensures the international aspect of adaptation is considered at decision-making levels)	Amber
		R9	Learning and support networks are available to enable all decision makers in producing and implementing appropriate climate adaptation policies	Amber
Decision-making	Decision-making	D1	Priority adaptation options are identified, prioritised and selected based on robust, equitable and transparent methods (e.g. using decision support tools)	Red
		D2	An evaluation process is in place to assess the effectiveness of actions taken across all aspects of climate adaptation (i.e. from stakeholder engagement to mainstreaming)	Amber
		D3	The policy recognises that adaptation is an iterative and flexible process that accounts for new information/ experience	Amber
Mainstreaming	Mainstreaming	M1	Consideration of climate change adaptation been included in the national frameworks for environmental impact assessments and DRR's	Amber
		M2	Key policies recognise the need for adaptation action in future growth and development as a result of the impacts of climate change	Amber
		M3	National policy instruments promote adaptation at sectoral level, in line with national priorities	Amber
		M4	Adaptation is mainstreamed in insurance or alternative policy instruments to provide incentives for investments in risk prevention	Amber
		M5	Climate mitigation and adaptation are being investigated in tandem	Red
		M6	Adaptation actions are sustainable (i.e. meet environmental, societal and cultural needs) for their intended lifetime	Amber

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