

OECD study on adaptation strategy effectiveness
Ms. Kathleen Dominique, OECD

Lessons from the OECD Survey of Water and Adaptation Policies

As part of OECD's work on water and climate change adaptation, the OECD recently undertook a *Survey of Policies on Water and Climate Change Adaptation*¹ in all 34 OECD member countries and the European Commission. The results were used to highlight general trends, examples of good practice and draw lessons learned for the new OECD report *Water and Climate Change Adaptation: Policies to Navigate Uncharted Waters*.²

The survey reveals that **significant progress** has been made in recent years. Since Finland released its National Adaptation Strategy (NAS) in 2005, an additional 18 OECD countries have developed a NAS and another 8 countries are currently in the process of doing so. Ten countries have developed a National Adaptation Plan (NAP), and another 10 are currently developing such Plans. Water figures prominently in these efforts. Water is nearly always addressed as a priority sector or cross-cutting theme vital for a number key policy domains (e.g. energy, agriculture, infrastructure, transport, migration, biodiversity, and health).

Nearly all countries expect increasing water risks due to climate change. **Extreme events** (floods and droughts) are cited as a primary concern by 32 countries, along with the European Commission (EC). **Water shortage** is a key issue for 23 countries, as well as the EC. **Water quality** is a key concern for 15 countries, while impacts on **water supply and sanitation** were flagged by 16 countries. For 13 countries, **freshwater ecosystems** were among their primary concerns.

Adaptation is happening at **multiple governance scales** and countries are taking a variety of approaches. In the survey, 15 countries flagged sub-national responses. Adaptation at the sub-national level is the focus for some countries, while for others it is a complement to national planning. There are also numerous examples of **transboundary adaptation** initiatives to address common challenges in shared river basins, along common coast lines, or even in the context of providing financing for water supply and sanitation for cross-border communities.

The OECD **risk-based approach** to water security was used to identify policy responses to "know", "target" and "manage" water risks in a changing climate. Countries are focusing significant efforts on "knowing" the risk by building the scientific evidence base and disseminating information. Examples include flood risk maps and adaptation guidance for local governments. But, countries need to scale up efforts to better "target" and "manage" water risks. Some countries are revising laws and regulations, including sustainable abstraction limits, building codes and land-use planning regulations. Economic instruments, such as water tariffs, water-related environmental taxes, and flood insurance schemes are also being tapped to promote adaptation. Only a few countries have explicitly addressed **financing** for water and adaptation.

¹ Individual country profiles providing a snapshot of the challenge posed by climate change for freshwater resources and the emerging policy responses are also available for download at: www.oecd.org/env/resources/waterandclimatechange.htm.

² OECD (2013), *Water and Climate Change Adaptation: Policies to Navigate Uncharted Waters*, OECD Studies on Water, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264200449-en>.

In terms of **lesson learned**, the report points to the need to ensure that the evidence base meets the needs of users making practical, on-site adaptation decisions. In terms of policy responses, there is significant potential for scaling up the use of economic and regulatory instruments to improve incentives to manage water risks. Financing approaches should avoid skewing funds to “speciality” projects that might be easily labelled as adaptation, but do not necessarily maximise net benefits.

Contact: Kathleen Dominique (Kathleen.Dominique@oecd.org)