



**Just resilience :
Adaptation measures
should leave no one
behind**

cerac

INSIGHTS

“Leave no one behind” must be central to Europe’s climate resilience efforts. That is the main message of the report *“Social fairness in preparing for climate change: how resilience can benefit communities across Europe”*, published by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on June 10th, 2025¹.

As climate change impacts worsen, the report warns, societal preparedness for climate change must increase, and efforts to build resilience must **leave no one behind**. As it stands, socially vulnerable groups, such as older people, children, low-income groups, and people with disabilities, are **disproportionally affected by the impacts of climate change** and do not always benefit fairly from, or are even further burdened by, adaptation responses to these impacts.

Just resilience, according to the report, implies that:

- The **uneven impacts of climate change** are addressed;
- Individuals or social groups that are already vulnerable benefit fairly from, and are not disproportionately burdened by **adaptation responses** to these impacts (“leaving no one behind”)

To enable justice in adaptation efforts, policymakers therefore need to address the **systemic and structural** issues that perpetuate inequalities, focusing on transforming the underlying causes of these injustices.

Just resilience has three key dimensions: **distributional justice** (the fair allocation of resources and burdens from climate impacts and adaptation efforts); **procedural justice** (fair, transparent and inclusive decision-making processes); and **recognitional justice** (respecting and integrating diverse values, cultures and perspectives and addressing deeper causes of inequity).

While some progress is being made to embed justice considerations into adaptation efforts at the EU, national and subnational levels, their consistent **integration into all stages of the adaptation policy cycle** — particularly implementation — remains inadequate. The report thus highlights the need for concrete guidance on how to consider justice in adaptation responses.

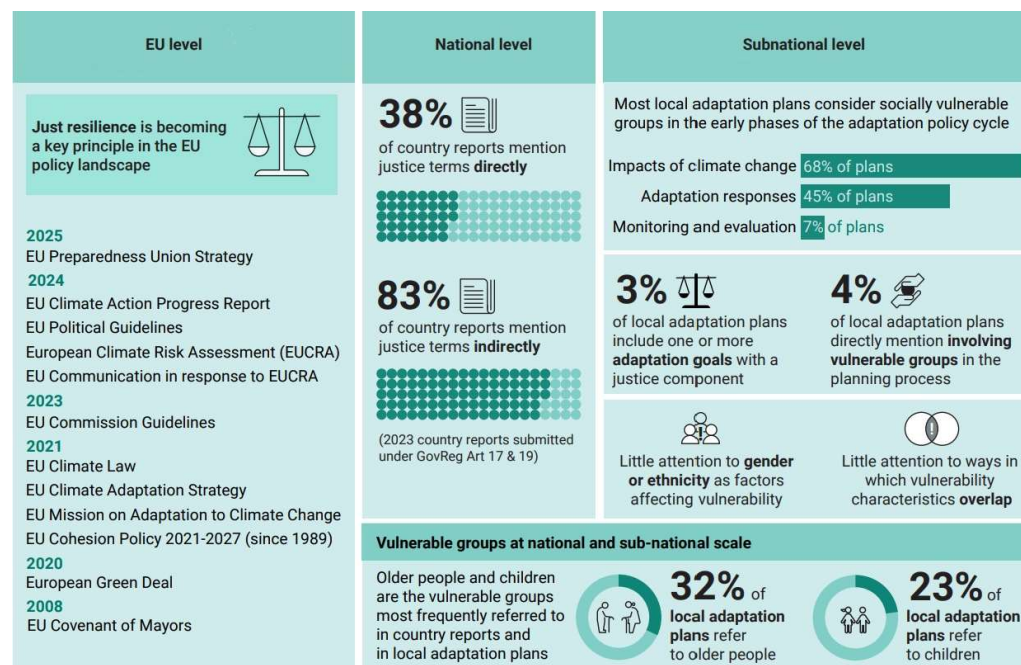


Figure 1: Overview of status of just resilience at the EU, national and subnational levels (EEA, 2025: p.10)

¹ European Environment Agency (EEA). (2025). *Social fairness in preparing for climate change: How just resilience can benefit communities across Europe*. Copenhagen, Denmark. doi: 10.2800/3683343

Recommendations:

Priorities for action, according to the report, include the development of a **monitoring framework** for assessing progress on just resilience at all governance levels.

- At the **EU level**, a dedicated funding mechanism should be established.
- At the **Member State level**, priorities include **integrating justice into adaptation policies** and other relevant policies and laws (e.g. energy and building policies, worker protection legislations, agriculture planning and financing).
- **Subnational authorities** should **engage vulnerable groups in planning** and implementing targeted adaptation measures that **address their unique needs and vulnerabilities**.

EU level	Member State level	Subnational level
 Make available dedicated funding or leverage existing funding	 Explicitly integrate justice in national-level adaptation policies and laws	 Prioritise justice from the very beginning of the planning process
Gather EU-wide comprehensive data 	Consider just resilience in related policies and laws (for example energy and building policies) 	Actively engage vulnerable groups in an inclusive and meaningful way 
 Develop a common definition and assessment framework	 Prioritise the inclusion of vulnerable groups in adaptation planning and ensure they have fair access to adaptation measures	 Implement targeted adaptation measures , recognising that particularly individual level measures may create injustice
The European Commission's climate adaptation plan (ECAP) will be a key opportunity to integrate justice into national adaptation processes, strategies and plans 	Develop national-level monitoring frameworks to assess progress 	Tailor information and capacity-building measures to ability and needs levels 

Figure 2: Overview of the priorities for action at the EU, Member State and subnational levels (EEA, 2025: p.16)

In Belgium

In Belgium, the **social impacts** of both climate change itself and adaptation policies are recognized at different levels in policy. For example, the Federal Plan for Sustainable Development (PFDD-FPDO, 2021) follows the “**leave no one behind**” principle, and forms the basis for the realization of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) in Belgium. It explicitly promotes **social cohesion** through **social justice** approaches and participative processes, as well as the **reduction of inequalities and poverty** through the evaluation of the **social impacts of policies**. The three regions also have adopted plans and strategies that include social justice as an important component of adaptation policy, such as Visie 2050 (Flanders), Déclaration de Politique Régionale 2019-2024 (Wallonia), Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (PRDD-GDPO, Brussels). Some more specific policies provide stipulations to **prioritize vulnerable populations** and consider issues of inequality and social justice but few go beyond general principles and most lack concrete implementation.

Some further initiatives in Belgium on the topic of **just resilience** include:

- Government administrations in collaboration with poverty organisations are working on **adaptation communication** for vulnerable groups, recognizing the need to communicate towards vulnerable groups with an adapted, diversified and inclusive approach, with clear, respectful and accessible messages².
- The federal government has developed a roadmap³ to protect workers from climate change within the framework of **well-being at work**. It focuses on monitoring impact, identifying actions to protect vulnerable workers when exposed to climate change risks and awareness and prevention for employers and employees.
- The federal government is preparing a strategy on how to make its buildings available to **vulnerable groups** during heat waves⁴.

However, while policy initiatives exist in Belgium that support just resilience and target vulnerable groups, there is a general **lack of clear targets**, and social and climate issues remain generally siloed. The conclusions of a workshop organised by Cerac (Climate Risk Assessment Center) on the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss for the Human and Health system underline that policies relating to social cohesion, inequality and well-being tend to exist in silos and are most often not connected to climate risks. Similarly, of the many initiatives surrounding climate risks, most do not consider (enough) social dynamics and vulnerabilities. This means that not only are the social consequences of climate change and of adaptation policies not adequately taken into account, but climate and adaptation policies may **unintentionally harm social needs** and cohesion. This underscores the importance both of **breaking out of existing the existing silos**, as well as of **involving vulnerable groups** in decision-making processes that target and impact them.

What is Cerac doing?

The EEA report underlines the importance of considering social vulnerabilities, inequities, and injustices at all levels of **reporting and policy making**. The **First Risk Assessment** for climate change and biodiversity loss in Belgium, in preparation by Cerac to be published in November of this year, is taking a first step in line with the recommendations of the EEA report in terms of **knowledge building** and **policy advice** regarding **just resilience and adaptation**. It explicitly recognizes the **social dimension** as a transversal and crucial aspect of the risks that Belgium faces due to climate change and biodiversity loss (identified as the two most urgent planetary boundaries).

This First Risk Assessment will include:

- A discussion of **social vulnerabilities and vulnerable groups** identified for each of the 29 climate change and biodiversity loss risks
- An analysis of the **increase in social inequalities and the decrease in social cohesion** as a specific risk of climate change
- A **transversal analysis of the vulnerable groups** identified and the mechanisms by which they are disproportionately impacted by different hazards
- Recommendations on the importance of considering **social justice** issues on all levels of policy

² <https://klimaat.be/news/2025/betere-klimaatcommunicatie-met-kwetsbare-groepen>

³ Synthesis report 2025, governance cycle of federal climate policy – in preparation

⁴ Federaal Regeerakkoord, p.96. http://www.belgium.be/sites/default/files/resources/publication/files/Regeerakkoord-Bart_De_Wever_nl.pdf

cerac

Cerac
Avenue Galilée 5/2
B-1210 Brussels

+32 (0)2 524 99 32
www.cerac.be
info@cerac.be