



Integrating climate change adaptation into civil protection

Adapting to climate change is essential to protecting populations against extreme weather events, but is it adequately integrated into civil protection policy? A new study has analysed the level of integration in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands and provided broad recommendations for improvement.

Since the Cold War, civil protection policy in many countries has shifted from a sole focus on military issues to include natural disasters as one of its major concerns. It has also become more proactive and strategic, planning ahead and preparing, rather than simply reacting to crises. As such, it appears that climate change adaptation should become part of civil protection.

The study explored how climate change adaptation and civil protection have been integrated at a national and local level in Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands. The researchers gathered information by analysing policy documents and government websites, and conducted interviews with informants on civil protection, local political leaders and key personnel.

Since the early 2000s, adaptation in Norway has been a task for civil protection authorities. When Norway's Climate Adaptation programme was launched, it was the Directorate for Civil Protection's responsibility. The Directorate is also responsible for supervising local authorities on assessing risk in relation to climate change.

Sweden has no official, specific national adaptation strategy. Some adaptation tasks are proposed for national civil protection authorities, such as mapping areas vulnerable to flooding, landslides and coastal erosion, but adaptation tends to be the shared responsibility of several authorities.

Unlike Sweden and Norway, the Netherlands has no separate governmental body for civil protection. It is based on the 'safety region' concept, for which 25 regional bodies are responsible. The adaptation strategy is part of a programme that protects the country from flooding (the Delta programme) but civil protection is not involved.

At a local city level, in Bergen (Norway), Malmö (Sweden) and Rotterdam (Netherlands), adaptation efforts are conducted by land use planners, environmental staff or those responsible for flood protection, and not those within civil protection systems. It appears that recent weather-induced events, both locally and abroad, trigger adaptation measures which tend to be based on current rather than future climate.

It appears that Sweden is behind Norway and the Netherlands in integrating adaptation into civil protection policy. Differences in institutional structures could play a role, for example, it is easier to integrate adaptation and civil protection strategies if they are both centralised, as is the case in Norway. However, Sweden lacks a national adaptation strategy and the Netherlands has no central civil protection unit, which could make integration at a national level more difficult.

The researchers suggest that radical change in governance is needed to better integrate adaptation into civil protection. They emphasise the importance of understanding the policy cultures of policy domains involved in this process, i.e. the environment and the civil protection policy areas. The former aims to transform society, whereas civil protection aims to maintain and protect today's society from external threats. This fundamental conflict may potentially separate adaptation from mitigation and thereby increase the risk of mal-mitigation (mitigation that results in increased societal vulnerabilities) as well as mal-adaptation (adaptation that results in increased GHG emissions).

The study suggests that strategies to avoid such problems will identify the dangers, and develop policy paths in international conventions on climate change that acknowledge the important role of local authorities in climate policy.

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