



POLICY BRIEF

ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE IN SMALL AUSTRIAN MUNICIPALITIES

Influencing factors and recommendations for agenda setting and implementation

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How can the comparatively young policy field **climate adaptation** be set on **municipal policy agendas**? How can the **long-term implementation and continuation** of anticipatory adaptation succeed in the many **small Austrian municipalities**? The **project GOAL**, funded by the Climate and Energy Fund within the ACRP programme, has investigated these questions from different angles, identified influencing factors together with actors from practice, administration and policy-making, and developed recommendations to support municipal adaptation to climate change.

When it comes to coping with climate change, municipalities are a crucial level, because it is here that immediate climate change impacts converge with concrete opportunities for action. The effects of climate change are being felt on the local level in a direct and increasing way and are causing growing adaptation needs. At the same time, municipalities own important competencies relevant to adaptation, both as part of their statutory and their optional tasks, as well as the local knowledge necessary to implement adequate measures. Moreover, the advantages of effective adaptation measures benefit directly the respective municipality.

Especially in small to medium-sized municipalities (90% of all Austrian municipalities have less than 5,000 inhabitants, 99% less than 30,000 inhabitants), adaptation to climate change has rarely arrived at local agendas. Experiences and capacities regarding how to make an issue of anticipatory adaptation in municipalities, how to integrate it in municipal decision-making processes and structures, and how to implement adaptation in a structured way are still largely missing outside of model regions of the funding programme KLAR! (Climate and Energy Fund), which has been launched in 2016. This is aggravating implementation of adaptation strategies of the national state and the provincial governments and inhibiting the emergence of local bottom-up initiatives.

Adaptation to climate change is thus a field of action for municipalities of increasing urgency, but has rarely been addressed on this level. That is why the **project GOAL** has researched i) whether, why and how municipalities in other countries are adapting to climate change, and ii) which experiences have been made with integrating and implementing the two more mature environmental policy fields of sustainable development and mitigation of climate change on the local level in Austria, in order to iii) draw lessons and conclusions for climate adaptation in small Austrian municipalities. Analysing and synthesizing the respective findings has allowed identifying influencing factors for agenda setting and long-term institutional anchoring as well as developing - jointly with multi-level stakeholders - policy recommendations for municipal climate adaptation under specific Austrian context conditions. The present policy brief summarizes these key project results.

Altogether, **18 barriers** (hindering factors, obstacles) and **23 success** factors (drivers, facilitating factors) for municipal climate adaptation have been identified from a governance-oriented perspective. Depending on the specific local context, agenda setting and implementation are usually inhibited or facilitated by varying combinations of influencing factors, which thus contribute crucially to success or failure of municipal adaptation. All barriers and success factors as well as their interdependencies are described in detail in the synthesis report of the project¹. Influencing factors that occur most frequently and are exhibiting especially strong effects are highlighted in table 1 and table 2 below.

Table 1: Particularly relevant success factors for municipal climate adaptation

Particularly relevant success factors
EF1 Acute or growing problem pressure <i>in combination with</i>
EF2 Windows of opportunity by other external events
EF7 Committed, active actors in the municipality
EF9 Institutionalised responsibility in municipal administration <i>in combination with</i>
EF20 Supportive and coordinating governance framework by higher-ranking levels (national state, federal states) <i>and</i>
EF21 Public financial incentives for climate adaptation in municipalities
EF10 Professional external support
EF14 Pragmatic approaches, incremental implementation, entry through single projects

Table 2: Particularly relevant barriers for municipal climate adaptation

Particularly relevant barriers
HF1 Difficult diffusion of the new topic climate adaptation
HF3 Limited municipal capacities
HF4 Missing or unclear responsibilities
HF6 Low political relevance and missing local political will
HF14 Dependency on single committed actors

Based on the success factors and barriers, **recommendations for agenda setting and implementation** (continuation, institutionalisation, anchoring) have been derived and elaborated. The focus is on the governance dimensions of municipal climate adaptation, i.e. on the processes, structures and interactions within municipalities, to external actors and to other levels of government and administration. The policy recommendations are designed as to contribute to coping with barriers and exploiting success factors. Depending on the varying local context conditions, it is possible to combine the altogether **14 recommendations** into adaptation pathways specific to each municipality. The recommendations are meant to support and inspire actors relevant to adaptation and to provide building stones for paving the way toward climate resilient municipalities. They address primarily municipalities, transfer and advisory organisations, and administration on the federal and state level. The majority of recommendations can be tackled in a self-responsible way by municipal actors themselves. However, no level alone is sufficient to act successfully.

All recommendations have been elaborated in a structured way in the synthesis report¹. An overview of the recommendations for local adaptation to climate change in small Austrian municipalities is given in table 3 below.

Table 3: Overview of the policy recommendations on the governance of climate adaptation in small Austrian municipalities with key messages for implementing actors

No.	Title of recommendation	Key message
H1	Communication of advantages and benefits of adaptation measures for municipalities	<i>Emphasize advantages!</i>
H2	Using 'windows of opportunity' created by problem pressure and extreme weather events	<i>Use windows of opportunity!</i>
H3	Securing support from political key actors and working toward fundamental decision	<i>Get key actors on board!</i>

No.	Title of recommendation	Key message
H4	Establishing clear responsibilities for adaptation and allocating resources	<i>Define responsibilities!</i>
H5	Organising internal and external cooperation on adaptation	<i>Organise cooperation</i>
H6	Involving professional external expertise	<i>Involve external experts!</i>
H7	Entry through smaller, low-cost measures with positive effects in either case	<i>Small, immediately beneficial measures first!</i>
H8	Organising transition from reactive to anticipative adaptation	<i>Plan in a forward-looking way!</i>
H9	Integrating adaptation in instruments of municipal planning	<i>Anchor in local planning!</i>
H10	Creating regional networks of municipalities for inter-municipal cooperation	<i>Create municipal networks!</i>
H11	Local awareness-raising and involvement of the public	<i>Talk about adaptation!</i>
H12	Supportive framework by the state government, in cooperation with transfer and advisory agencies	<i>Offer support, and use it!</i>
H13	Public funding for municipal adaptation combined with 'soft coercion'	<i>Offer funding, and use it!</i>
H14	Evaluating, re-adjusting, continuing and capitalising on the KLAR! programme	<i>Learn from good practice examples!</i>

Further project results (scientific publications, policy briefs for decision makers, presentations, and target group-specific communication products) are available at www.klimawandelanpassung.at.

¹ Lexer, W.; Stickler, T.; Buschmann, D.; Steurer, R. & Feichtinger, J. (2020): SYNTHESEBERICHT: Klimawandelanpassung in kleinen österreichischen Gemeinden. Hemmfaktoren, Erfolgsfaktoren, Empfehlungen