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UNDERPIN's Outcome-Oriented Adaptation MEL Framework: From Adaptation Tracking to Outcome Harvesting

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background on the Thematic Working Group on Monitoring and Evaluation

The Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) are a cornerstone of collaboration within the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, bringing together experts from EU-funded projects to exchange knowledge, align efforts, and maximise impact. These groups focus on key adaptation themes and play a vital role in generating practical resources to support regional and local adaptation efforts.

The TWG on Monitoring and Evaluation (TWG-M&E) was constituted in 2023 to "collaborate and develop a common M&E framework by pulling together tools to jointly elaborate the approach" (TWG meeting, Nov. 9, 2023). During the 2023-2025 work programme, the TWG-M&E developed two outputs: (1) *Insights on monitoring climate adaptation activities: Deriving lessons learned from monitoring adaptation activities in projects under the EU Mission on Adaptation* (available here) and (2) *Roundtable summary document on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) of climate adaptation projects* (available here)

The **UNDERPIN** project is leading the work of the TWG-M&E during the 2025-2027 work programme. **UNDERPIN**, "oUtcome iNDicators to mEasuRe Progress on climate resilience" (September 2025-September 2028), addresses critical gaps in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) for climate adaptation across Europe. A flagship project of the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change, this project focuses on outcome indicators to measure effectiveness of adaptation solutions. The project results aim to serve as a reference framework to measure adaptation progress in the EU and help assess the advancement of the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change across the engaged regions in a way that is compatible with the efforts of the Global Goal on Adaptation and the EU Adaptation Strategy.

The following workshops have taken place as part of the TWG-M&E 2025-2026 work programme:

- *Developing a Framework for Tracking Adaptation Outcomes,* held on 29 January 2026. The workshop report is available here.
- *Assessing adaptation action outcomes: From theory to practice,* was held on June 26th, 2026. Workshop materials can be found here, workshop recording here, and workshop report here.

This report includes the results of the third TWG MEL workshop, held online on October 21st, 2026. The following activities are planned for the fall of 2026 and 2027:

1 2027 Workplan planning session (December 2026).

2 Workshop 4 (Q1/Q2 2027): Technical evaluation of the dashboard and visualization functionalities to ensure compatibility with local/regional needs.

3 Policy Outlook Roundtable (Q4 2027/Q1 2028): High-level policy-validation and strategic discussions.

Additional information can be found in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Thematic Working Group and UNDERPIN sites.

1.2. Workshop goals and structure

The workshop *UNDERPIN's Outcome-oriented Adaptation MEL Framework: From adaptation tracking to outcome harvesting* was organized by the UNDERPIN project in the context of the TWG-MEL aimed to present and critically review the first draft of the UNDERPIN outcome-oriented MEL framework.

The workshop aimed to assess the proposed framework's relevance, clarity, practical applicability and added value. It began with a presentation of the UNDERPIN framework, its underlying principles and its proposed approach for moving beyond the monitoring of adaptation activities and outputs towards assessing adaptation outcomes, including changes in climate risks, vulnerability and resilience. The presentation introduced the framework's 12 steps, organised around four interconnected components: anchoring the evaluation, tracing what to assess, measuring the evidence, and using evaluation findings to inform decisions and learning. The full presentation can be found here.

Following the presentation, participants engaged in facilitated focus-group discussions around five guiding questions:

1. **Outcome orientation.** Does this framework help shift MEL from tracking activities and outputs towards understanding adaptation outcomes and changes in resilience and risk? Why or why not?
2. **Decision-making relevance.** Would applying this framework produce evidence that is useful for decisions on adaptation (i.e. iterative adaptation planning and implementation, risk evaluations, etc.)?
3. **Practical applicability.** Can this framework enable a design or improvement of an adaptation MEL system? What would make it easier to apply in practice?
4. **Clarity and accessibility.** Is the framework understandable to someone who is not an MEL or evaluation specialist? What concepts, steps or language are difficult to grasp?
5. **Added value.** Overall, what is your impression of the proposed added value of UNDERPIN's framework?

The workshop ended with a plenary discussion to share and reflect on the main insights from the breakout groups.

2. Key findings and recommendations from the workshop discussions

2.1. OUTCOME ORIENTATION: Does this framework help shift MEL from tracking activities and outputs towards understanding adaptation outcomes and changes in resilience and risk? Why or why not?

- Participants welcomed the framework and considered it a useful contribution to shifting MEL beyond tracking activities and outputs towards understanding adaptation outcomes and changes in resilience and risk. However, they noted that measuring outcomes remains challenging.
- The framework's strong focus on outcomes may make it harder for some users to understand where outcomes fit within the broader MEL cycle. Also, users may better understand outcomes when they are explicitly contrasted with inputs, outputs,

processes, and impacts. Participants suggested to make link to other steps and inputs, outputs etc. more explicit and communicate that the outcome indicators complement rather than replace other types of indicators.

- A key point was the need to clarify how the framework relates to the adaptation policy cycle. Participants favoured embedding MEL within the policy cycle rather than treating it as a separate component of project design. This would make it easier to assess whether adaptation is effective and whether progress is being made. If the framework is used as a standalone component, its core elements and criteria would need to be defined earlier in the process.
- Participants also highlighted the need to account for context from the outset, including the scale, timeframe and type of adaptation (incremental or transformational). The framework should start by asking what adaptation is intended to achieve and how uncertainty will be addressed. It should also be dynamic and responsive to changes in risk trajectories, with regular reviews and adjustments as risks evolve.
- Finally, participants stressed the importance of aligning MEL timeframes and timing of revision cycles with relevant regional or national policy cycles, while recognising that different levels of intervention operate on different timescales (e.g., project timeframes are shorter than the ones from programmes).

2.2. DECISION-MAKING RELEVANCE. Would applying this framework produce evidence that is useful for decisions on adaptation (i.e. iterative adaptation planning and implementation, risk evaluations, etc.)?

- To support decision-making effectively, indicator selection should be embedded within decision-making processes from the beginning
- The most valuable indicators are usually those that decisionmakers actually use
- Relevant stakeholders should be involved in indicator selection, and an additional reflection question or guidance could help users assess whether all relevant stakeholders (also people with decision-making powers and responsibilities) have been considered and involved in the design process.
- Communication should flow both ways, with stakeholders helping to define the information needed for decision-making rather than only receiving results.

2.3. PRACTICAL APPLICABILITY. Can this framework enable a design or improvement of an adaptation MEL system? What would make it easier to apply in practice?

- Participants highlighted that indicator selection, evaluation and operationalization are particularly challenging for local authorities, making the guidance provided by the UNDERPIN framework a valuable contribution.
- Participants suggested that key criteria, such as those developed for monitoring National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), could help regions design or improve their adaptation MEL systems.
- They also highlighted the value of conducting a gap analysis to identify a manageable set of indicators that address actual decision-making needs and reflect available capacities.

- An important question is the extent to which the framework builds on existing indicators, data and MEL systems, rather than creating parallel systems. Participants noted that many existing indicators and targets operate at the EU or national level, with limited coverage at the subnational and local level. The framework should therefore clarify how higher-level indicators can inform decisions at these scales, while identifying indicators that can capture adaptation progress at lower scales.
- A decision tree or similar tool could help users navigate these complexities and identify suitable indicators based on their context, objectives, decision-making needs and available capacities.
- The framework should include mechanisms for revising indicators and plans when they prove unsuitable once implementation is underway. Experts should provide guidance on how to adjust methods and indicator quantifications.
- The main challenge identified was balancing accessibility, practical applicability and technical rigour. The framework needs to be useful for a wide range of users, from small cities with limited resources and MEL capacity to regions with greater technical expertise.

2.4. CLARITY AND ACCESSIBILITY: Is the framework understandable to someone who is not an MEL or evaluation specialist? What concepts, steps or language are difficult to grasp?

The framework as it stands now may be too complex for many intended users for a variety of reasons:

- Technical language can be difficult to understand and might benefit from simplification
- The framework may need translation into local languages
- Users could feel overwhelmed by 12 steps; a simplified entry version could be useful, with the option to explore additional levels of for more advanced users. The four thematic blocks – anchor, trace, measure, evaluate – were seen as useful and could be used as a starting point.
- The four thematic blocks were viewed positively and may offer a more accessible structure than presenting all steps at once.
- Explanatory factsheets and practical examples could help users understand concepts, indicators, and terminology. Being very explicit in our communication would also benefit users.
- Simplifying the framework might also increase the sustainability of use: If applying it is too complex, local administrators might quickly give up once external support through consultants or projects ends.
- Tailor communication to different target audiences, recognizing that technical experts and non-specialists may require different levels of detail and approaches to presenting and communicating information.
- Be aware of stakeholders' needs and perspectives and how they may perceive and respond to the information provided. This also applies to stakeholders involved in data

collection, recognising the potential for data provision fatigue and the need to minimise additional reporting burdens.

2.5. ADDED VALUE: Overall, what is your impression of the proposed added value of UNDERPIN's framework?

- Participants highlighted the importance of the first two blocks – anchor the evaluation/vision and framing; and trace what to assess – as they encourage early reflection and planning, helping users to consider intended adaptation outcomes from the outset.
- Participants emphasised the need to keep the framework manageable and demonstrate its value in resource-constrained contexts. It should build on ongoing processes and discussions, avoid unnecessary complexity and provide practical guidance that helps users make informed decisions without creating an excessive reporting burden.

3. Concluding remarks

Overall, participants welcomed the UNDERPIN framework and recognised its potential to contribute to more outcome-oriented MEL. They valued its emphasis on defining intended adaptation outcomes from the outset and moving beyond the monitoring of activities and outputs towards understanding changes in climate risks, vulnerability and resilience.

The discussions highlighted several priorities for further developing and refining the framework.

First, **strengthening its integration into ongoing adaptation planning and decision-making processes** was considered essential. Rather than being treated as a separate monitoring exercise, MEL should be embedded throughout the adaptation policy cycle, with indicators selected according to the information needed by decisionmakers and other relevant stakeholders. The framework should also account for changing risk contexts and different policy and implementation timeframes, allowing for periodic review and adjustment.

Second, **improving practical applicability and building on existing systems emerged as important priorities**. Participants emphasised the need to support users in selecting a manageable set of meaningful indicators, drawing on existing data and MEL systems wherever possible, and avoiding additional data gathering and reporting burdens. Practical guidance, decision-support tools and mechanisms for reviewing indicators would help translate the framework into operational MEL systems.

Third, **enhancing clarity and accessibility** was identified as a key condition for its uptake and sustained use. Participants suggested simplifying technical terminology, providing practical examples and explanatory materials whenever possible, and developing different levels of guidance adapted to users' capacities and needs. The four thematic building blocks of the framework were viewed as a useful, simplified structure for making its approach more accessible for less experienced users.

Across these priorities, a central message was the **need to balance methodological rigour with flexibility and usability**. The framework's added value and long-term sustainability will depend not only on its ability to support the assessment of adaptation outcomes, but also on whether regional and local authorities, including those with limited resources and technical capacities, can realistically apply it to inform decisions and improve adaptation actions.

The feedback gathered during the workshop will inform the next stages of the UNDERPIN framework's development, particularly its practical guidance, supporting tools and communication to different target audiences.



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