the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

Statement of the Pan-European Summit and Call to Action

From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience in Europe at Local and Regional Levels



Summary

The Pan-European Summit on Climate Resilience, held in Vienna on 28-29 August 2025, brought together scientists, policymakers, mayors, governors, youth leaders, business representatives, civil society actors, and faith communities. Hosted by the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences, in collaboration with leading European partners, the Summit provided a unique platform for linking science, policy, ethics, and faith to address Europe's climate emergency. Rooted in the spirit of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'* – which emphasizes the profound ecological interdependence between humanity and nature – the Summit built upon the Call to Action for Resilience, issued at the global Vatican Summit in 2024.[1]

Participants in the Vienna Summit agreed that Europe – currently the fastest warming continent – faces a profound moral and practical challenge. While cutting greenhouse gas emissions remains essential, the Summit stressed that adaptation and societal transformation must be prioritized alongside mitigation. Building resilience means anticipating risks, responding effectively, and fostering adaptation in a socially just manner. Europe also carries a global responsibility to support resilience efforts in vulnerable regions, particularly across Africa. Despite concerns over the insufficient pace of climate action, the Summit conveyed a positive vision, placing trust in Europe's citizens and its community, cultural, policy, business, and youth leaders to drive the transformative changes required.

Europe's climate-related challenges include intensifying heatwaves, droughts, floods, and wildfires, which threaten health, food security, and cultural heritage. Melting glaciers destabilize water and energy systems, while coastal erosion endangers communities and historic landscapes. Agriculture, fisheries, and rural livelihoods are under mounting pressure. All this raises questions of justice and intergenerational responsibility. The transboundary nature of these impacts – disrupting supply chains, energy systems, and migration patterns – exposes Europe's interdependence.

The Summit identified twelve priority actions: empowering local leaders, integrating biodiversity into resilience strategies, strengthening disaster preparedness and cross-border cooperation, developing innovative and equitable finance and insurance mechanisms for vulnerable communities, safeguarding health from climate-related impacts, protecting fragile mountain and coastal ecosystems, transforming food systems, land use, and energy infrastructure, investing in transparent, high-quality science and data, embedding justice and accountability into governance frameworks, elevating youth leadership, and positioning Europe a model of climate resilience, democracy, and global solidarity.

The Call to Action appeals to every sector – local governments, national and EU policymakers, businesses, investors, civil society, faith communities, educators, and media – to mobilize science, solidarity, and moral courage. The goal is to build resilient societies capable of thriving amid the inevitable climate shocks of the coming decades. The document emphasizes local solutions and community-driven action, global cooperation, transparent scientific models, and youth-driven innovation and accountability. It acknowledges the contribution of hundreds of participants and partners, concluding that climate resilience is not merely a technical challenge – it is a moral obligation for Europe and the world.

1. Introduction and Shared Vision

The Pan-European Summit on Climate Resilience, held in Vienna on 28-29 August 2025, gathered scientists, policymakers, mayors, governors, business leaders, youth representatives, faith-based actors, and civil society organizations from across the continent. Hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (PAS) and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences (PASS), in partnership with the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the European Academies of Sciences Advisory Council (EASAC), and the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the Summit provided a unique space for dialogue between science, policy, and society. Special emphasis was placed on the role of cities, local governments, and the transformative leadership of youth organizations.

Participants reaffirmed the urgent need for coordinated, science-based, and socially just action in response to Europe's climate crisis and its global repercussions. While mitigation remains the cornerstone of climate policy, the realities of a rapidly heating planet demand immediate attention to adaptation and societal transformation. These priorities must be advanced alongside

accelerated decarbonization across all sectors and systems. The Summit underscored Europe's responsibility to lead by example, through the collective agenda of its nations, subnational governments, and the European Union's institutions – Commission, Parliament, and Court of Justice.

The Vatican Academies' role as conveners reflects their moral and ethical commitment to safeguarding both people and the planet. Inspired by the vision of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Summit acknowledged the complementary power of faith and reason, with scientific evidence guiding policy, and moral conviction motivating action. Faith-based communities, alongside universities, schools, and other institutions, were recognized as essential partners in shaping a culture of responsibility and resilience.

A strong call emerged for accelerated, place-based adaptation, recognizing that resilience must be built locally, where the impacts of extreme weather and climate change are most acutely felt. Cities, regions, and rural areas must be empowered to manage resilience, supported by science, local knowledge, and innovative governance. Subnational governments – mayors, governors, and regional leaders – expressed readiness to play stronger roles not only within their nations but also in European and global arenas, including future UN Climate Conferences (COPs). The Summit emphasized the importance of inclusive approaches that draw on collaboration between scientists, policymakers, civil society, and faith actors to ensure that climate strategies are rooted in integrated solutions.

Youth voices played a pivotal role throughout the Summit, actively participating in every session while also setting their own agenda and delivering outcome statements. Their leadership served as a powerful reminder that intergenerational justice is essential to the legitimacy and long-term sustainability of Europe's climate policies.

2. Background, Rationale, and MAST Concept

The global community – and Europe in particular – stand at a defining moment. Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is a present reality, already altering weather patterns, increasing the frequency and severity of disasters, and posing threats to health, wellness, lives, livelihoods, and ecosystems. In a time of geopolitical uncertainty, it is even more important that Europe plays a significant and proportionate role in addressing global issues while fostering climate resilience across its diverse regions.

Building **resilience** involves **anticipating** threats and risks, **preparing** for unavoidable impacts, **responding** swiftly and effectively to disasters, **recovering and rebounding**, using adversities as an opportunity to innovate, improve, and adapt in ways that are just. This also implies that Europe has a global responsibility to support adaptation efforts in other parts of the world, particularly in low-income countries such as those in Africa.

To date, climate policy has focused primarily on mitigation – reducing greenhouse gas emissions to slow global warming. While global mitigation is essential, it is no longer sufficient on its own. Even under the most optimistic emission reduction scenarios, additional planetary heating is inevitable in the coming decades. This reality demands that local **adaptation** and **resilience-building** become central pillars of climate strategy. The **Mitigation, Adaptation, and Societal Transformation (MAST)** framework, developed and endorsed by PAS/PASS and global experts in 2022, defines the three mutually reinforcing pillars of climate resilience:

1. **Mitigation**: Take immediate and decisive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, bend the global emissions curve downward, and promote carbon removal/retrieving greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, aiming for climate neutrality by 2050 and limiting warming to below 2°C, ideally 1.5°C. Mitigation also brings near-term health co-benefits.
2. **Adaptation**: Implement proactive strategies to reduce vulnerability and exposure to climate hazards, while improving the capacity of communities, economies, and ecosystems to adapt. Adaptation places a strong emphasis on people's health at the local level – in cities, towns, and rural areas – before scaling outward. Adaptation measures taken now can significantly reduce the cost of human-induced global warming, safeguarding the quality of life for both present and future generations. Integrating mitigation and adaptation wherever possible is essential to minimize maladaptation.
3. **Societal Transformation**: Major shifts in values, behaviors, governance, and economic systems toward a sustainable and humane future. Pope Francis called it "an ecological conversion", emphasizing the moral, cultural, and ecological aspects of climate action. Historical precedents include the Ecumenical understanding published in Vancouver in 1983.

The path forward must be guided by values, ethics, and a shared sense of responsibility. Addressing climate resilience can be prompted by emotions, concerns, and a sense of hope. The Vienna Pan-European Summit builds on a decade of PAS and PASS bridging science, policy, and moral leadership in the global response to climate change:

- **The Faith and Science Initiative** (2021), chaired by Pope Francis, brought together leaders of faith communities from around the world, along with the Pontifical Academies, in cooperation with the UK, Italy and the Vatican, to strengthen the COP26 agenda in Glasgow, successfully elevating issues of equity, water, food, and agriculture.[2]
- **The 2022 MAST workshop** at the Vatican prepared and formalized the climate resilience framework, emphasizing that resilience must be rooted in local governance and community action.[3]
- **The Global Summit on Climate Resilience at the Vatican (May 2024)** brought together mayors and governors from all continents, culminating in a Planetary Call to Action[4] signed by Pope Francis and supported by all attendees and other leaders. The Summit recognized the climate crisis as an immediate emergency and proposed to develop a "Universal Protocol of Resilience" to craft region-specific strategies while contributing to a global framework.[5]

The MAST framework must be tailored to regional contexts and cultures, making regional summits such as the European one essential.

3. The European Climate Challenges and their Moral Aspects

Europe is facing a complex web of climate challenges that demand responses grounded not only in science and policy, but also in ethics, justice, and solidarity. Applying the MAST framework of Mitigation, Adaptation, and Societal Transformation to the European context underscores the importance of tailoring solutions to regional realities, engaging communities in decision-making, and fostering open, cross-border exchange of knowledge and data. At the heart of this effort lies a moral imperative: ensuring that policies prioritize equity and justice, protecting the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized – especially children, the elderly, low-income households, and displaced populations – who bear the heaviest burdens. Rising temperatures and intensifying heatwaves threaten public health, dignity, and livelihoods, particularly in Europe's densely populated cities and fragile landscapes. Droughts jeopardize food security and ecosystems, while wildfires in southern regions devastate rural communities and landscapes of cultural and emotional significance. Shifting precipitation and melting glaciers destabilize water systems, energy supplies, and tourism economies, undermining both human security and cultural heritage. Coastal flooding and erosion imperil settlements and historic landscapes, reminding us that what is at stake is not only infrastructure but also shared identity and memory. Agriculture and fisheries face mounting pressures from soil degradation, new pests, and declining yields, placing rural livelihoods at risk and raising ethical concerns about intergenerational food security. These risks transcend borders. Disrupted supply chains, climate-induced migration, and stressed energy systems expose the systemic vulnerabilities of Europe's interconnected societies. Health is increasingly endangered – not only by heat stress, but also by the spread of vector-borne diseases and worsening air pollution, with smoke, dust, and toxic particles deepening inequalities in exposure. Europe's climate crisis is therefore not only a technical challenge but a profound moral test. It demands solidarity across regions, a commitment to justice across generations, and the courage to place human dignity and ecological integrity at the center of transformation.

4. Twelve Pillars of European Action

The Pan-European Summit explored and emphasized twelve interconnected themes, each forming a critical pillar of Europe's pathway to climate resilience.

1. Sharing Best Practices among Mayors and Local Leaders

Cities and regions are already implementing innovative nature-based measures, from green infrastructure in Northern Europe to wildfire prevention in the Mediterranean. Peer-to-peer

collaboration among local leaders can accelerate resilience across the continent by sharing and scaling proven strategies.

2. MAST and Nature: Adapting the Resilience Concept to European Realities

The MAST framework – Mitigation, Adaptation, and Societal Transformation – was tailored to Europe's diverse socio-economic, institutional, and environmental contexts, leveraging governance structures, climate legislation, and cultural diversity to make strategies actionable at both local and transnational levels. MAST must be intrinsically connected with biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration, recognizing nature's central role in resilience.

3. Disaster Recovery and Prevention: Floods, Storms, Heatwaves, and Land Instability

Integrated disaster risk management is essential. Early warning systems, nature-based solutions, and post-disaster recovery guided by a "build back better" principle must be scaled. Lessons from recent floods and fires highlight the need for EU-wide capacities and stronger cross-border emergency cooperation. As risks grow, so too does the urgency and opportunity for collaboration.

4. Financing Resilience and Innovative Insurance

Resilience financing must be sustainable, fair, and shared as a responsibility across Europe and beyond. Innovative mechanisms such as green bonds, resilience-linked finance, parametric insurance and mandatory climate risk insurance can protect vulnerable communities while driving climate-proof investments.

5. Health Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is already affecting health: heat-related deaths, respiratory illnesses, the spread of vector-borne diseases, and the trauma of displacement and climate anxiety are on the rise. Expanding public health infrastructure, integrating climate risks into healthcare planning, and increasing R&D for neglected diseases are urgent priorities. Mitigation and adaptation also offer health co-benefits, such as reduced air pollution, healthier diets, more active lifestyles, that strengthen both collective and individual resilience.

6. Mountain Systems: Protecting Glaciers, Water, and Ecosystems

Europe's mountain regions, from the Alps to the Carpathians, the high mountains of the Balkans, and the Pyrenees, are acutely affected by climate change. Melting glaciers and permafrost, as well as shifting snow patterns, heighten hazards while undermining water security, hydropower, and mountain biodiversity. Coordinated monitoring, early-warning systems, transboundary water governance, and sustainable tourism models are urgently needed to protect these fragile

ecosystems.

7. Coastal Resilience for Europe's Diverse Shorelines

Rising seas, erosion, and saltwater intrusion threaten Europe's coastlines. Nature-based solutions such as wetland restoration, alongside engineered defenses and adaptive coastal zoning, must be scaled up. Lessons from the North Sea, Baltic, and Mediterranean, as well as Europe's large rivers, show the need for integrated approaches that balance human safety with ecosystem health.

8. Sustainable Land Use, Agriculture, Energy Systems, and Bioeconomy

Transforming Europe's food and land systems is indispensable for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reversing biodiversity loss. Resilient strategies include efficient irrigation, maintaining environmental flows in river basins, promoting green infrastructure, and developing new plant breeding technologies for climate-resilient crop varieties, and much more attention to sustainable land use and soil health. Societal transformation must also extend to dietary habits: greater adoption of plant-based diets and alternative proteins can improve health while reducing environmental impacts. All this contributes to transformation towards circular economies and the bioeconomy.

9. Innovation in Data, Models, and Science

New tools – digital twins of cities and sub-regions, climate scenario modeling, and horizon scanning – can strengthen foresight and risk prediction serving policymaking. But data must be transparent, reliable, and democratized. Investments in open data, AI, and model literacy are essential so that cities and regions can independently use science for resilience planning. Climate models, increasingly applied at local scales, must remain transparent and trustworthy, serving as a public good and therefore requiring public finance.

10. Societal Transformation: Governance, Accountability, and Collaboration

Climate resilience also requires cultural and moral shifts – rethinking governance, corporate responsibility, consumption patterns, and civic engagement. Faith-based communities play a vital role, with Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* serving as an ethical guide to clarify the ecological interconnectedness of humans and nature and the complementarity of science and faith-based approaches. Stronger legal frameworks, multi-level governance, and accountability mechanisms are crucial, alongside recognition of Europe's interdependencies in food supply, migration, and geopolitics.

11. Youth Engagement in MAST Solutions

Youth leaders proposed bold ideas: climate education reform, strengthening climate literacy, promoting green jobs, and transforming mobility and consumption. They demanded systemic, just, and inclusive climate action, with fair taxation, redistribution, and local ownership of solutions. They emphasized accountability, intergenerational justice, and the responsible use of digital tools. Youth are not just advocates – they are innovators, researchers, and project leaders capable of reshaping the resilience agenda.

12. Europe at the Forefront in Resilience, Energy Transition, and Climate Justice

Europe has the potential to be at the forefront of the global climate response by combining rapid decarbonization with ambitious resilience strategies. This includes promoting energy system transformation, advocating for climate justice in international negotiations, and leveraging Europe's scientific, economic, and cultural influence to inspire domestic and global action. To be effective, this leadership also requires linking climate justice to peace, democracy, and social cohesion, recognizing that climate resilience and peace are inseparable. Participants at the Summit expressed concern over the declining ambition and funding of Europe's climate policies, warning of threats to security and democratic stability. Faith-based communities and civil society must help foster a cultural transformation, ensuring that no one is left behind.

5. Call to Action

The Vienna Summit concluded that reducing emissions alone is not enough; Europe must build societies that can endure, adapt, and thrive amid inevitable climate shocks in the coming decades. This is not merely a technical challenge – it is a moral test of justice, solidarity, and human dignity. Local leaders are uniquely positioned to embed resilience within their cities and regions, crafting solutions grounded in community realities and natural systems. National governments must weave the MAST framework into their development strategies and dramatically expand financial and technical support for adaptation. The European Union must act with courage, aligning internal policies with global solidarity, eliminating harmful subsidies, and ensuring that carbon pricing is both efficient and equitable. Scientists and educators must be empowered to provide knowledge and foresight, with their independence protected as a cornerstone of democratic resilience. Youth will continue to hold decision-makers accountable, innovate boldly, and inspire change, demonstrating that a better future is possible. Civil society, churches, and faith-based communities must nurture the cultural transformation required for resilience, mobilizing values of care, justice, and stewardship. Businesses and investors must channel resources into resilient infrastructure and innovation, supported by regulatory frameworks that reward long-term responsibility over short-term gain. Finally, the media must defend truth and science, resist disinformation and help the public understand both the risks and the hope embedded in the transformations ahead. The path forward is clear and urgent. Through science, solidarity, and moral courage, Europe can be at the forefront building a resilience future.

List of Conference Participants

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[1] From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience (2024) https://www.pas.va/en/events/2024/climate_resilience.html

[2] https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/10/04/0627/01342.html#en and https://www.pas.va/en/news/2021/2021_cop26.html

[3] https://www.pas.va/en/publications/scripta-varia/sv152pas.html

[4] https://www.pas.va/en/events/2024/climate_resilience/call_to_action_climate_change.html

[5] https://www.pas.va/en/publications/scripta-varia/sv156pas.html

[6] This is a Statement by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, gratefully recognizing the contributions of participants and partners in the Pan European Climate Resilience Summit in Vienna. This shall not be considered a negotiated consensus statement, and it shall not imply consensus among all participants or the organizations with which they are affiliated.

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