

Highlights of GAO-16-454, a report to the Honorable Matthew Cartwright, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2013, GAO placed Limiting the Federal Government's Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks on its high-risk list because climate risks and weather-related disasters present a financial risk to the federal government. The 2017 President's Budget estimated that the U.S. government incurred over \$357 billion in direct costs because of weather-related disasters in the last decade. The U.S. Global Change Research Program states that climate change and associated weather-related disasters may increase these costs. These impacts call attention to the federal government's role as a leader in coordinating and informing government efforts. Enhancing resilience through hazard mitigation and climate change adaptation—for example, by building flood protections—may help reduce these costs. Other governments face similar risks and have developed strategies for enhancing resilience.

This report focuses on fiscal exposure to climate-related risks and describes (1) how selected governments have approached enhancing resilience to weather-related disasters through climate change adaptation and (2) steps the U.S. government has taken to enhance resilience through climate change adaptation. GAO reviewed literature and government documents; interviewed U.S. and other government officials and stakeholders; and selected a nongeneralizable sample of four countries—Mexico, the Netherlands, the Philippines, the United Kingdom—and the European Union for further examination, based on criteria including stakeholder recommendations.

View GAO-16-454. For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.

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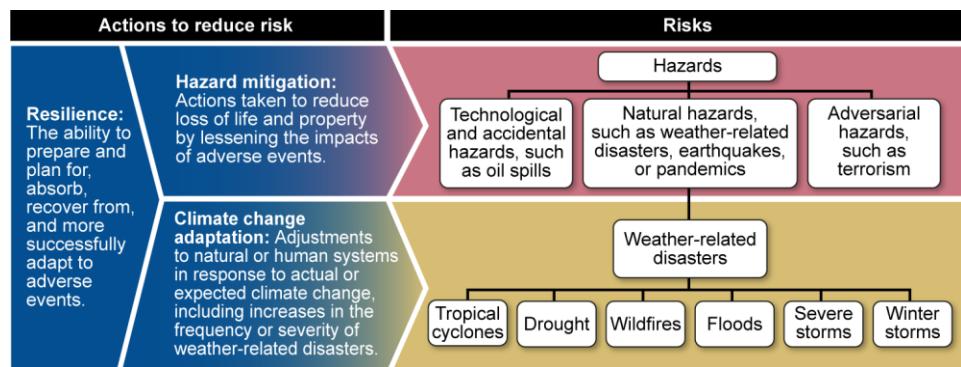
CLIMATE CHANGE

Selected Governments Have Approached Adaptation through Laws and Long-Term Plans

What GAO Found

Selected governments have approached enhancing resilience through climate change adaptation, and some have aligned adaptation with broader resilience efforts (see figure). All five selected governments have enacted laws and developed long-term plans as a part of their approaches to climate change adaptation. These plans established frameworks for addressing climate risks. For example, the European Union and the Netherlands made long-term funding commitments for enhancing resilience, and the United Kingdom developed a system for monitoring and evaluating its climate change strategy. These laws and strategies have helped governments identify priority actions, facilitate consensus among stakeholders, provide reliable resources, and identify areas for improvement. The Philippines and the United Kingdom have also aligned their adaptation strategies with broader resilience strategies that address other risks, such as terrorism and health pandemics. This alignment may provide co-benefits, such as infrastructure investments that protect against climate change impacts; enhance resilience to all disasters; and create economic opportunities.

Relationship among Risks, Resilience, Hazard Mitigation, and Climate Change Adaptation



Source: GAO analysis of Presidential Policy Directive 8, previous GAO work, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data. | GAO-16-454

The United States has taken steps to enhance resilience through climate change adaptation and aligning climate change adaptation with broader resilience efforts. Legislation has been introduced to enhance resilience to weather-related events. Specifically, in 2014 and 2015, a bill to enhance the federal government's planning and preparation for extreme weather was introduced in Congress but not enacted. In addition, the President issued an executive order directing federal agencies to develop or update adaptation plans and establishing the Council on Climate Change Preparedness and Resilience. Further, the President's Climate Action Plan sets strategic climate change adaptation priorities. The Executive Office of the President also collaborates with the Mitigation Framework Leadership Group, an intergovernmental coordinating body created to integrate federal efforts and incorporate risk management and hazard mitigation in all planning, decision making, and development.