Accelerating Climate Action: Navigating towards a Low-Emissions, Climate-Resilient Future

D7.3 - Quality Control and Risk Management Plan

WP7–Project Management

31/08/2025

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EC Summary Requirements

1. Changes with respect to the DoA

No changes with respect to the work described in the DoA.

2. Dissemination and uptake

This plan is supposed to guide the internal processes of quality assurance and risk management within the ACCLIMATE Consortium. It is not intended for widespread public dissemination.

3. Short summary of results (<250 words)

This deliverable provides an overview of the organizational quality assurance and quality control policies and measures in place at the Wuppertal Institute as the coordinator of the ACCLIMATE project. Moreover, it contains project-specific procedures for review and quality control of the project outputs. Finally, the deliverable contains a discussion of major implementation risks of the project and corresponding contingency strategies. This risk analysis is based on a premortem exercise that was conducted during the project coordination board meeting of 7 July 2025.

4. Evidence of accomplishment

The evidence of accomplishment of this deliverable is provided through the submission of this report.

Preface

The overall objective of ACCLIMATE is to achieve enhanced integrated national and international strategies for climate-resilient, low-emission development. ACCLIMATE will contribute to improving the transparency, consistency, and clarity of GHG emission reduction commitments and create appropriate tools by developing an assessment framework for mitigation commitments. Working in a bottom-up manner with national experts within an international consortium comprising high-emitting countries from the Americas, Asia and Europe, as well as low-emitting countries from West Africa, ACCLIMATE will identify needs for improvements of NDCs and long-term strategies. A focus will be set on adequacy, fairness and feasibility, as well as on needs for improving current policies and measures to actually achieve NDCs and long-term objectives.

WUPPERTAL INSTITUT FUR KLIMA, UMWELT, ENERGIE GGMBH	WI
FONDATION INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE ET LES RELATIONS INTERNATIONALES	IDDRI
VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL	VUB
AALTO KORKEAKOULUSAATIO SR	AALTO
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E3-MODELLING AE	E3M
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Executive Summary

This deliverable provides an overview of the organizational quality assurance and quality control policies and measures in place at the Wuppertal Institute as the coordinator of the ACCLIMATE project. Moreover, it contains project-specific procedures for review and quality control of the project outputs. Finally, the deliverable contains a discussion of major implementation risks of the project and corresponding contingency strategies. This risk analysis is based on a premortem exercise that was conducted during the project coordination board meeting of 7 July 2025.

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1 Introduction

This deliverable serves a dual purpose: (1) It provides a detailed description of the procedural and organizational measures implemented to assure high quality of the scientific and outreach-related outputs of the ACCLIMATE project, and (2) it establishes an initial risk management plan describing the factors that have been recognised as posing a potential risk for the implementation of the ACCLIMATE project activities. This plan also defines the estimated impact of the risks and the means of mitigating them.

The next section describes the quality assurance mechanisms at the organisational level at the Wuppertal Institute. As the lead beneficiary of the ACCLIMATE project, the Wuppertal Institute assumes leading responsibility for the quality assurance and quality control measures related to the ACCLIMATE project. In addition, the section details project specific quality control procedures implemented with the support of the entire ACCLIMATE consortium.

The last section details an initial analysis of the general implementation risks faced by the ACCLIMATE project and the project's response strategies. It also specifies the processes of periodic risk monitoring which will be conducted under the auspices of the ACCLIMATE project coordination board.

2 Organizational and Procedural Measures for Quality Control

2.1 Organizational measures for quality assurance and quality control at the Wuppertal Institute

The Wuppertal Institute is the lead beneficiary of the ACCLIMATE project and oversees the project management. In this capacity, the Wuppertal Institute is ultimately responsible for establishing thorough procedures for quality control under the ACCLIMATE project. The organizational quality assurance and quality control measures implemented at the organizational level will be fully applied to the ACCLIMATE project.

The work of the Wuppertal Institute is regularly evaluated internally and externally. The evaluation procedures are used to ensure and maintain high quality standards in research and dissemination. The main evaluation criteria are scientific quality, societal relevance and research impact. Aspects of scientific quality assurance are embedded in the Institute's project acquisition strategy, its staff development strategy, its information management as well as its doctoral program.

External evaluation: The Wuppertal Institute underwent its first evaluation by the German Science and Humanities Council in 2001/2002. The second evaluation followed in 2011 and was published in May 2012. In its response to the Wuppertal Institute's 2018 report, which laid out how the Council's recommendations were being implemented, the Science Council acknowledged the Wuppertal Institute's ongoing positive development. The Council also endorsed the idea that future evaluation processes should be conducted under the umbrella of the Johannes Rau Research Association. In 2020, the Johannes Rau Research Association evaluated the Institute for the first time. This was part of an evaluation cycle comprising all research institutions receiving basic funding from the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia. The reviewers concluded that the Wuppertal Institute as a scientific institution with a strong emphasis on real-world impact and application, delivers outstanding work. Going forward, it is well-positioned to act as a key catalyst in specific implementation processes, helping to drive the transition towards a greenhouse gas-neutral and resource-light society. The next evaluation will take place in 2026. In addition, an International Scientific Advisory Board reviews the Wuppertal Institute's research concept on a yearly basis.

Internal evaluation: The Wuppertal Institute's scientific management, the Scientific Quality Management and Strategy Development Unit, and the heads of divisions perform internal quality assurance at the Institute. The evaluation criteria are compliance with the Wuppertal Institute's research agenda and established scientific criteria such as the review procedure, the use of appropriate research methods and statistical evaluation methods.

DFG Guidelines/Cooperation with the University of Wuppertal:

Since August 1, 2019, the new "Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice," published by the German Research Foundation (DFG) have been in effect. Non-university research institutions like the Wuppertal Institute can acknowledge and adopt the DFG Code by partnering with a research institution that implements it (cooperation model).
Following this approach, in **2023** the Wuppertal Institute established a **cooperation agreement** with the University of Wuppertal (BUW). This agreement is built upon the BUW's Regulations for safeguarding good scientific practice (link in German), which are themselves based on the DFG Guidelines.
This cooperation agreement has been positively reviewed by the DFG.

2.2 Project-specific quality control procedures

In cooperation with WP leaders and sectoral leads, WI will be responsible for the quality control of the project and ensuring a high quality of all deliverables. A key component of high-quality outputs is the tailoring of outputs to the needs of the respective target audience. From the outset, ACCLIMATE has made an effort to clearly define target audiences for each of its outputs and deliverables (see the project's Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation plan). ACCLIMATE targets two primary audiences: (1) the scientific community and sectoral experts in each of the five target sectors (Energy, Industry, Transport, Buildings and AFOLU) and (2) national policy makers and stakeholders in the partner countries of the project. Within the countries, the target audience is split into the five sectors. While the style of presentation will vary according to those audiences, the same procedures of quality control will be applied for all ACCLIMATE deliverables.
The principal investigators, Wolfgang Obergassel, Maike Venjakob and Georg Holtz, are ultimately responsible for the quality of the work towards the European Commission. However, quality assurance will be a shared responsibility of the project team (most notably, the work package leaders who are also members of the project coordination board). Within the ACCLIMATE consortium, responsibility is assigned hierarchically for the quality of the deliverables. At the operational level, the responsibility lies with the corresponding task leads for each deliverable, together with the corresponding work package leads.
At the management level, the Wuppertal Institute will organise a thorough peer-review process for each deliverable and will conduct a final quality control particularly with respect to the presentation of the deliverables.

2.2.1 Quality assurance requirements for publications

Procedural requirements will differ between longer publications such as scientific outputs or longer policy reports and more immediately policy-relevant outputs such as policy papers, newsletters and blog posts.

- **Deliverables** (academic manuscripts and policy reports):
    - A final draft of the corresponding deliverable will be ready for review **one month prior to the submission deadline** of that deliverable.
    - The draft will be reviewed by at least **two internal reviewers** with relevant (sectoral) expertise that were not directly involved in the preparation of the deliverable.
    - The **Wuppertal Institute is responsible for assigning reviewers** and organizing the review process. Usually, the reviewers will include one researcher involved in the same work package (but not the task at hand) and one "outsider" from the wider consortium.
    - The **review shall be completed within two weeks** in order to reserve sufficient time for corresponding revisions.
    - The **revisions of the deliverable shall be finalised by the lead author at least one week before the deadline** to allow for final copy-editing and layouting.
    - Project partner Holistic will prepare the fully layouted final version for submission.
    - The coordinator (Wuppertal Institute) will upload and submit the deliverable only after a **final check** of presentation and consistency with the requirements detailed in the work programme.
- For **Policy Papers** that are based on previous substantive outputs/deliverables a streamlined process shall apply:

- A final draft of the policy paper shall be made available three weeks before the scheduled publication of the policy paper.
- One researcher from the ACCLIMATE consortium who was not involved in the preparation of the policy paper (or the underlying research), shall review the draft within one week.
- For policy papers that are based on substantive research that is not otherwise subject to internal quality control procedures, the same requirements as for deliverables apply.

- For **newsletters and blog posts** the following internal procedures apply
  - newsletters and blog posts will be reviewed internally by at least one member of the dissemination and communication work package who was not otherwise involved in the preparation of that text and by the project coordinator.

2.2.2 Quality assurance for events and other outreach activities

All ACCLIMATE outreach activities (WP6 in close cooperation with WP 1) are based on a detailed Communication, Dissemination and Exploitation (CDE) plan and will be updated regularly (see D 6.2). The target groups and how to reach them are precisely defined in this plan: it lists different channels to reach the different target groups, such as preferred communication methods, a social media pack, relevant conferences where to meet them and raise their interest, identification of relevant media channels and synergies that could be created with other EU projects or networks.

The CDE plan also defines indicators for monitoring dissemination and communication activities. The online communication strategy defines ways to monitor the project's performance with these indicators, such as social media use, content creation and sharing with the appropriate hashtags and audiences/links/contacts, creation of web pages on partners' websites, overview of all partners' databases to investigate and maximise the dissemination potential. The strategy will be reviewed and revised once a year, as appropriate, after each monitoring cycle, to change or improve activities where we find that the targeted goals for indicators have not been satisfactorily achieved.

3 Risk Management

3.1 Initial Risk Assessment

WI as coordinator is responsible for a risk management strategy and contingency planning. Due to the size and transdisciplinary ambition of the ACCLIMATE work programme, certain implementation risks related to the interconnected nature of the project and factors out of the control of the project consortium require appropriate risk-mitigation measures, both of which were already identified in the project proposal.

3.2 Results of Premortem Exercise

To identify further key implementation risks, a premortem was held at a project coordination board meeting on 7 July 2025. A premortem calls for a team to imagine the project has failed and deduce causes for the failure. The team then proposes changes to the project plan to address causes of the failure (Gallop, Willy, and Bischoff 2016).

As a first step the coordination board brainstormed potential risks that were collected on a Miro board. Some of the risks identified in the brainstorming were already contained in the initial risk assessment while others were additional. The results were then discussed, and team members were able to allocate three points to the risks they considered most critical. Table 2 lists all issues that received at least one vote from the members of the coordination board participating in the premortem.

Table 2. Premortem voting on key implementation risks

Problem	# of votes
1) Delay/lack of inputs needed between WPs	4
2) Policy scenarios not relevant due to changed policy priorities	4
3) Underestimation of the workload	4
4) Non-submission or delayed submission of NDCs 3.0 by a good number of the 10 case study countries	4
5) The project lacks "integration" (of different WPs, different tasks, methodologies, etc.)	3
6) US partner (Maryland) barred from contributing	3
7) Modelling of low quality or intractable	2
8) Conflicts between partners	2
9) Lack of access to data required for modelling	1
10) Inability to access national experts for expert interviews	1
11) Underestimation of costs for events and travel	1
12) Key staff leave midway through the project	1
13) Postponement of UNFCCC and other political and scientific processes	1
14) Contradictions/incompatibilities of the narratives of the different sectors as well as between national and international levels	1
15) Too large gaps between the modelling and what stakeholders expect	1
16) Mid-term review by Commission is devastating, requiring a complete overhaul of the project	1
17) Significant data loss occurring (e.g., on audio or text documentation of stakeholder interactions)	1
18) Analysis of feasibility, adequacy and fairness proves politically controversial	1

Subsequently, the risks that received three or more votes were discussed to identify options to pre-emptively address them and/or develop a contingency plan.

3.2.1 Delay/lack of inputs needed between WPs

To allow for the early identification of delays and take remedial actions, the Project Coordination Board will meet monthly to discuss the progress of each WP, including tasks, deliverables, and milestones. In order to ensure effective coordination across WPs, inputs that are particularly crucial for other WPs will be identified. Furthermore, the WP leads will be invited to update the status of deliverables in the Project Management Tool (D7.1) for each coordination board meeting.

3.2.2 Policy scenarios not relevant due to changed policy priorities

The modelling strategy will be flexible, allowing for new directions to overcome intractabilities as required. Quality control procedures are implemented, including the review of data analysis, assumptions, model-based projections and deliverables by other qualified partners. The Sectoral Conversations in WP1 will be used to identify priority changes early on. Additionally, the analytical focus will be on long-term structural issues, rather than short-term priorities.

3.2.3 Underestimation of the workload

The Project Coordination Board will convene monthly to discuss the progress made on WPs, Tasks, Deliverables, Milestones and resource consumption, thereby enabling early remedial action. In addition, the work planning will happen early on and available flexibility will be used to tailor the work in detail to the resources that are available.

3.2.4 Non-submission or delayed submission of NDCs 3.0 by several of the ten case study countries

If relevant NDC submissions are delayed, the project will consider dropping those countries from the case studies in WP2. Alternatively, the work may be delayed, which would have an impact on the resources and timing of WP2, as well as on other WPs, especially WP5. Whether this risk materialises will be checked in October 2025.

3.2.5 The project lacks “integration” (of different WPs, different tasks, methodologies, etc.)

To mitigate this risk, the project kick-off meeting already featured a session dedicated specifically to the integration of work packages. The project team will monitor the critical deliverables for the other WPs. Integration will be included as a recurring agenda item in Coordination Board meetings. In addition, sectoral work streams that cut across WPs will be established and meet regularly as part of the Sectoral Conversations in WP1.

3.2.6 US partner (Maryland) barred from contributing

The board determined that how to address this risk needed to be discussed with the University of Maryland. This discussion took place subsequently, the results are presented in the updated risk assessment below.

3.3 Updated Risk Assessment

Based on the results of the pre-mortem exercise, the initial risk assessment was updated as indicated in the table below:

- Additional risks and potential risk mitigation measures identified in the pre-mortem were added to the list.
- For those risks that had already been identified at the proposal stage, risk mitigation measures were revised.

Table 3. Updated critical risks for implementation

Description of risk (likelihood):	WPs involved	Level of impact	Proposed risk mitigation measures
Delay/lack of inputs needed between WPs (low-medium)	WP3, WP4, WP1, WP6, WP5, WP2	high severity	Project Coordination Board to convene monthly to discuss progress made on WPs, tasks, deliverables, and milestones, allowing to identify delays early on and take remedial actions. In order to ensure effective coordination across WPs, inputs that are particularly crucial for other WPs will be identified. Furthermore, the WP-leads will be reminded to update the

			status of deliverables in the Project Management Tool (D7.1) for each coordination board meeting.
Modelling of low quality or intractable (low)	WP3, WP4	high severity	Modelling strategy will be flexible allowing for new directions to overcome intractabilities, as required. Quality control procedures include the review of data analysis, assumptions, model-based projections and deliverables by other, qualified partners.
Lack of access to data required for modelling (low)	WP3, WP4	high severity	List of potential data sources already identified, to be further developed early on; alternative data sources to be used in case of lack of access to primary databases. All modelling teams have developed sophisticated, automated routines to integrate new data into their tools and translate them into parameters to be directly used by the models. For some sectors multiple sources of information will be explored in order to understand potential discrepancies between national and global data sets.
Policy scenarios not relevant due to changed policy priorities (medium)	WP3, WP4	high severity	The consortium includes national partners from all focus countries of the project who are constantly keeping abreast of political developments in their respective countries. The Sectoral Conversations in WP1 will be used to identify priority changes early on. As part of WP1, interactions with policy-makers and other stakeholders are at the core of ACCLIMATE, while sectoral experts in task 1.2 will provide support to the development of relevant global sectoral transition pathways. In Task 1.1, the consortium will undertake a series of national engagements to fully understand political priorities in all focus countries. The modelling strategy will be flexible, allowing for new directions to surpass intractabilities if needed. Additionally, the analytical focus will be on long-term structural issues, rather than short-term priorities. The consortium is thus able to quickly identify policy changes and adapt policy scenarios accordingly.
Language barriers preventing access to local contexts and policy documents (low)	WP1, WP2, WP3, WP5	medium severity	The consortium includes national partners from all focus countries of the project, the consortium will therefore have direct access to local contexts and relevant policy documents.

Inability to access national experts for expert interviews (low)	WP2, WP3, WP5	medium severity	The consortium includes national partners from all focus countries of the project, the consortium will therefore have direct access to national experts.
Underestimation of costs for events and travels (low)	WP1, WP7	low severity	The time since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic has demonstrated that virtual events are a viable format for many purposes. The project therefore relies on physical events only to a very limited extent, mainly for national engagements in WP1, capacity building in WP3 and project meetings in WP7. All project partners have established sound infrastructures for conducting events and activities like interviews online. In case costs for physical events have been underestimated (or that there is unforeseen rapid inflation), we would take one of the following measures, (in the following order to minimise the effect on the value of the events): (i) move events to lower-cost venues; (ii) convert events to virtual meetings; (iii) shorten the duration of events; (iv) decrease the number of participants and invited speakers.
Underestimation of the workload (low)	All	medium severity	The Project Coordination Board will convene monthly to discuss progress made on Work Packages, Tasks, Deliverables, Milestones and resource consumption, thereby enabling. early remedial action.
Conflicts between partners (low)	All	high severity	The careful design of the Consortium Agreement, with clear provisions on relevant issues regarding project work, task allocation, finances, administration, knowledge management, etc., will help to avoid conflicts. Discussion and debate within the consortium will occur at project meetings, workshops, in the Project Coordination Board, and on an on-going basis via email and phone calls. If serious conflict does arise, the coordinator will discuss mitigation actions with the respective partner(s), seek assistance from other partners, or, in extreme cases reallocate the work amongst the other partners. If the conflict involves the Project Coordinator, or the problem cannot be resolved in dialogue, a meeting of the full Project Coordination Board and Project Officer would be called to make a final decision.

Key staff leave midway through project (medium)	All	medium severity	All partners are sizeable, well-established institutions with adequate capacity and resources. New staff can be recruited and effectively trained. Effective internal communication procedures including regular coordination board and work package meetings will ensure that all necessary information is widely available. Coordinator and WPLs have deputies to ensure a smooth transition in case a staff member leaves.
Postponement of UNFCCC and other political and scientific processes (medium)	All	medium severity	Planning of the project has been tailored to the current UNFCCC schedule. The postponement of COP26 and of IPCC AR6 have demonstrated that, while very unlikely, postponement of political and scientific processes may happen. Should such delays occur, the envisaged impact will partly be beyond the project duration and the outreach and exploitation activities will be affected. The project team will constantly monitor the situation and adapt the project planning as needed, in agreement with the Project Officer.
Non-submission or delayed submission of NDCs 3.0 by several of the ten case study countries (medium)	All	medium severity	If this risk occurs, the project will consider dropping those countries from the case studies in WP2. Alternatively, the work may be delayed, which would have an impact on the resources and timing of WP2, as well as on other WPs, especially WP5. Whether this risk occurs will be checked before the COP30.
The project lacks “integration” (of different WPs, different tasks, quant + qual, etc.) (low-medium)	All	high severity	To mitigate this risk, the project kick-off meeting already contained a session dedicated specifically to integration of the work packages. The project team will monitor the critical deliverables for the other WPs. Integration will be included as a recurring agenda item in Coordination Board meetings. In addition, sectoral work streams that cut across WPs will be established and meet regularly as part of the Sectoral Conversations in WP1.
US partner (Maryland) barred from contributing (medium)	WP1, WP2, WP3, WP5, WP6,	medium severity	The organisation of the University of Maryland’s participation via the University System of Maryland Foundation mitigates the risk of interference by the US government. USMF is constantly analysing political developments and how potentially upcoming risks might be addressed.

3.4 Continuous Risk Monitoring

The list of project implementation risks included above has also been incorporated into the project management tool (see D7.1). The project coordinator and the coordination board will use this tool to review implementation progress, to identify new or re-assess previously identified risks and correspondingly adopt measures to mitigate those risks and ensure timely and high-quality delivery of the ACCLIMATE project results.