



## PRESS RELEASE

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Thematic public report

# MOUNTAIN RESORTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

**With 53.9 million skier-days, France ranks second in the world for winter tourism, just behind the United States. In the 1960s and 1970s, winter tourism in the mountains grew considerably in France, with the construction of winter sports resorts as part of the government's winter sports plans. One of the consequences of this policy of resort development was to make mountain areas heavily dependent on skiing. The report published today analyses the effects of climate change on mountain resorts in particular, and examines the extent to which they have adapted. A total of 42 resorts - spread across the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Massif Central and the Jura - were examined by an inter-jurisdictional panel (FIJ) comprising the Court of Accounts and the *regional* audit chambers (CRC) of Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, Nouvelle-Aquitaine, Occitanie and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur. In addition, the creation of a database of 200 resorts has enabled a more exhaustive statistical analysis to be carried out. While the survey shows that the French ski business model is in decline, it also highlights the fact that public policies to adapt it are not up to the challenge, and makes six recommendations aiming at finding appropriate ways to diversify.**

### **A business model that is running out of steam**

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the economics of ski resorts have been permanently affected by climate change. Scientists are predicting a loss in the reliability of snow cover and a rise in the rain-snow line.

Confronted with this phenomenon, ski resorts are vulnerable to varying degrees, depending on their exposure to climate risk, the economic and social impact, and the financial capacity of local authorities to adapt. By 2050, all these resorts will be affected to a greater or lesser extent, with some hoping to continue operating beyond that date.

Climate change is already having a growing impact on local government finances. The management of ski lifts requires major investments and a sufficient level of visitor numbers to generate the revenue needed to renew fixed assets. Weakened by the lack of snow and the decline in the number of skiers, more and more resorts are already unable to reach the break even point. As a result, they need to be extremely cautious when it comes to investment.

## Adaptation policies not up to the challenge

These policies, implemented by mountain stakeholders, are essentially based on snow production, which ensures reliable snow cover in the short term. However, it provides only relative and temporary protection against the effects of climate change. Its cost is high and its effectiveness tends to diminish as temperatures rise. Furthermore, the impact of snow production on water resources appears to be underestimated in many areas.

The diversification measures implemented by the resorts are rarely backed up by a comprehensive plan. Carried out on a similar basis, they often tend to reproduce the ski model, based on major investment and high visitor numbers.

Adaptation policies are insufficiently supported by the Government, whose ecological planning measures do not address the challenges of the mountain tourism sector. Similarly, the regions do not seek to influence local decision-making, despite their powers in terms of tourism planning. Their intervention has in fact increased snow production strategies without taking account of climate change forecasts.

## How mountain resorts can adapt to climate change

To take better account of climate change, the Court of Accounts recommends that each mountain resort draw up an adaptation plan. Public funding should be conditional on the existence of these plans and compliance with them.

In addition, the Court believes that it would be in France's interest to promote an organisation that brings together all the parties concerned, with a governance structure that extends beyond the *municipalities* alone, bringing together public and private players.

Finally, the Court notes that the introduction of "four-season" tourism and the dismantling of obsolete ski lift installations will require major investments that the resorts most affected by climate change will find difficult to finance. For this reason, the Court recommends the creation of a mechanism for financial solidarity between resorts.

**[Read the report](#)**

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