

Economic Commission for Europe

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary Context

Meeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment in
a Transboundary Context serving as the
Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on
Strategic Environmental Assessment

**Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment
and Strategic Environmental Assessment****Seventh meeting**

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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Promoting ratification and application of the Protocol and the Convention

**Guidance on addressing health impacts of plans and
programmes and for the involvement of health authorities in
strategic environmental assessment: a concept note****Note by the secretariat**

This note presents a concept note for the development of guidance on addressing health within strategic environmental assessment. The note has been prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The need for the development of guidance for the assessment of potential health impacts of plans and programmes and for the involvement of health authorities, has been identified by Parties and future Parties to the Protocol. Its development is foreseen in the 2017–2020 workplan for the implementation of the Convention and the Protocol adopted by the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol at their last sessions (Minsk, 13–16 June 2017, see decision VII/3–III/3, annex II, ECE/MP.EIA/2017/23/Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/7/ Add.1), subject to the availability of funding.

The guidance is expected to be developed in cooperation with WHO, with support from external consultants, and with funding from the EIB. The development of the guidance would start in 2018, with a draft guidance presented for consideration of the Working Group on EIA and SEA in 2019 and ultimately finalized for adoption by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol in 2020.

The Working Group on EIA and SEA is invited to comment the concept note and to provide guidance for the implementation of the activity.

I. Background

1. The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment¹ to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) was adopted in 2003, and is in force since 2010. To date (April 2018), the Protocol has 32 Parties, including the European Commission, in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. The Protocol is open for accession by all the United Nations member States.

2. The Protocol aims to ensure that health considerations are integrated alongside with environmental ones in the preparation and adoption of Government plans and programmes as well as, to the extent appropriate, of policies and legislation. It therefore requires Parties to the Protocol to address relevant health aspects throughout the SEA procedure, including through mandatory consultations with health authorities.

3. Efficient consideration of the likely health impacts in SEA remains a challenge in a number of countries of the UNECE region, however. Partially, this is a result of incomplete transposition of the Protocol on SEA to the national legislative frameworks. Other main explanatory factors for the relatively limited or weak practice by Parties in ensuring that SEA documentation systematically contains information on health² include: the often unclear role and the lack of capacities of the health authorities in SEA; uncertainty regarding the approaches and methods to be applied; and a limited availability of relevant data.

II. Purpose of the guidance

4. The guidance aims to assist Parties and future Parties to the Protocol on SEA in efficiently and consistently addressing relevant health issues in SEA. It will build on and further elaborate recommendations provided in the UNECE SEA Resource Manual³, and in particular in its annexes on health prepared in collaboration with WHO (Annex A1.1 'Health', and Annex A5.1 'Description of selected analytical tools') with the main focus on the approaches, methods, tools to be applied. (Any other relevant guidance material on health impacts would also be referred to.)

5. The guidance is intended to be mostly of practical nature. Building on the general guidance in the Resource Manual, it will provide specific recommendations supported by sector-specific case examples from the most relevant sectors (e.g. energy, transport, waste management), and guidance on technical aspects of the assessment and analysis of the likely health impacts of plans and programmes.

6. As relevant, the guidance would also aim to flag sub-regional and/or country specific considerations with respect to the assessment of health.

III. Main target groups

7. The guidance aims to target Parties to the Protocol in facilitating and improving their implementation of the relevant provisions of the Protocol but it is also meant to serve as a tool for capacity building by Governments within and beyond the UNECE region wishing to accede to the Protocol and/or comply with its provisions.

¹ The text of the Protocol on SEA (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/8) available at:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2017/EIA/MOP7/ECE_MP.EIA_SEA_8_T.pdf

² Identified in the Second Review of Implementation of the Protocol on SEA (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/9, available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=48009>) as a potential weakness or shortcoming in the Protocol's implementation that the Parties were to address.

³ ECE/MP.EIA/17, available from the Convention website in English and Russian, as well as in Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgian at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=27379>

8. The guidance would mainly target the two following groups:
- (a) Health and environmental authorities at the national and sub-national levels wishing to ensure that health issues are fully addressed in SEA; and
 - (b) SEA practitioners.

IV. Main contents

9. The guidance would contain three main parts covering the following issues:
- (a) *Good practice principles regarding health considerations in SEA*: This section would mainly address procedural and institutional aspects and means for integrating health considerations into plans and programmes, with an emphasis on the role of health authorities in SEA, and including recommendations on practical arrangements for efficient consultations with health authorities.
 - (b) *Approaches, methods and tools*: This section would provide more detailed guidance on technical aspects of the assessment and analysis of the likely health impacts of plans and programmes, involving the following topics:
 - Introduction: qualitative and quantitative approaches; health determinants versus health risk assessment techniques; overview of methods and tools;
 - Factors to be considered in selection of the most appropriate assessment approach, method or tool: the features of the plan or programme; data availability; main health issues to be addressed etc.;
 - Identification of the key health issues to be addressed in SEA (scoping) – this should include an overview of the main health determinants and indication of their linkages to the sectors covered by the Protocol on SEA (article 4) such as energy, industry including mining, transport, regional development, waste management and town and country planning and land use; recommendations regarding the level of detail of the analyses to be performed within the scoping stage; recommendations on procedures for engagement of stakeholders;
 - Assessing the likely health impacts, both negative and positive, and their distribution among the affected populations, with recommendations on: developing a health baseline; analysing patterns and trends of health indicators; establishing the level of detail of the appropriate analyses; evaluating data and inputs requirements; interpreting examples of results; identifying types of mitigation measures to be considered;
 - Monitoring: practical tips on how to monitor health effects of a plan or programme during its implementation; general health indicators to be used and recommendations on how these can be adjusted to the country- or sector-specific context; linkages to existing health monitoring schemes and statistics; suggestions regarding reporting; types of possible actions to be taken in case of unexpected significant health impacts.The section would also give practical guidance on the following issues:
 - How to present the health aspects in scoping and the SEA reports;
 - How to deal with limited data availability;
 - How should the health experts be involved in SEA (with an example of a terms of reference for health experts).
 - (c) *Good practice examples from Parties*: would be presented to support the guidance and illustrate its recommendations. The examples would be selected from Parties

that are considered more “advanced” in terms of assessment of health impacts (e.g. the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries).
