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Economic Commission for EuropeMeeting of the Parties to the Convention
on Environmental Impact Assessment
in a Transboundary ContextMeeting 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****Eighth meeting**

Geneva, 26–28 November 2019

Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Promoting ratification and application of
the Protocol and the Convention****Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (FasTips)****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

This note presents a draft informal pamphlet or “FasTips” on the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context. The secretariat has prepared the document in accordance with the workplan for the implementation of the Convention and its Protocol for the period 2017–2020 (ECE/MP.EIA/23.Add.1–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/7.Add.1, decision VII/3–III/3, annex I, item IV.3). The draft document aims at providing key facts, tips and practical information on the Protocol in a concise way. It is intended for Governments and stakeholders, including beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region, to raise awareness of the Convention in the global context. It follows the structure and the length requirements set by the International Association for Impact Assessment.¹

The Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment is expected to consider the draft document and provide guidance for its finalization prior to its submission to the International Association for Impact Assessment for publishing.

¹ See www.iaia.org/fasttips.php.



I. Issue, underlying concepts and approaches (400–500 words)

1. The Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) was adopted in Kyiv in 2003, entered into force in 2010, and, by September 2019, had 33 Parties in the ECE region, including the European Union. The Protocol is aligned with the European Union Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive² but has distinctive features, such as a special emphasis on health.
2. The Protocol is open to all States Members of the United Nations. It was inspired by global commitments to promote sustainable development, including principles 4 and 10 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21.³ Its Parties are convinced that the Protocol can help countries achieve targets under the Sustainable Development Goals by integrating them into national strategic planning. Moreover, its provisions can be used to plan action on climate change and to include related mitigation and adaptation measures in economic development planning.
3. The Protocol requires that a strategic environmental assessment be carried out for certain plans/programmes that are likely to have significant environmental, including health, effects. It also provides for non-mandatory assessment of policies and legislation (art. 13). It applies to proposed strategic planning documents of public authorities, at the national and local levels, across the economic and regional development fields.
4. The Protocol applies mainly at the domestic level but also provides for transboundary consultations when a plan/programme is likely to have significant effects in the territory of another country (art. 10).
5. The Protocol sets the following procedure:
 - (a) Parties first determine whether a plan/programme falls under the Protocol (arts. 4 and 5);
 - (b) If the Protocol applies, the next step is “scoping”, i.e. determining, in consultation with environmental and health authorities, and, possibly, involving public participation, the relevant information to be considered and included in an environmental report (art. 6);
 - (c) Then, Parties should prepare the environmental report covering the information and considerations set out in the Protocol. The report is to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant environmental, including health, impacts of the plan/programme and its reasonable alternatives (art. 7);
 - (d) Before any decision is taken, environmental and health authorities and the public concerned must have an opportunity to express their opinions on the draft plan/programme and the environmental report (arts. 8 and 9);
 - (f) When adopting the plan/programme, comments from the authorities and the public, the environmental report conclusions and the mitigation measures must be taken into account. The authorities and the public should be given access to the adopted document and be informed of how their comments were taken into account (art. 11);
 - (g) Lastly, Parties are responsible for monitoring an adopted plan/programme’s effects and for making monitoring results publicly available (arts. 12 and 13).

II. Side quote (10-25 words)

6. The Protocol sets an international legal framework for fostering sound and sustainable economic development and for improving governance and transparency in planning.

² Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2001 on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment, *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 197 (2001), pp. 30–37.

³ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992).

III. Five important things to know (max. 150 words)

7. Strategic environmental assessment brings higher sustainability gains than project-level environmental impact assessment because it: intervenes earlier in decision-making, when more options and alternatives are available; considers broad environmental objectives rather than project impacts; sets sustainable frameworks for future projects, preventing irreversible effects and costly mistakes; captures cumulative effects; and streamlines sectoral planning.
8. Strategic environmental assessment greens, informs and improves economic development planning, bringing focus, rigour and openness to alternatives and innovation.
9. Decision makers must carefully consider comments from environmental and health authorities and the public and explain how they have been taken into account: this improves transparency, public acceptance and trust in decision-making, including, as relevant, in a transboundary context.
10. The benefits of strategic environmental assessment outweigh its costs, which are marginal compared to those of plan/programme implementation, generally representing 5 to 10 per cent of planning costs.
11. Conducting strategic environmental assessments alongside planning processes saves time and money.

IV. Five important things to do (max. 150 words)

12. Consider becoming a Party to the Protocol and/or effectively implementing its procedures, after ensuring that national legislation is fully aligned with the Protocol, as required, by amending existing laws and implementing regulations and/or by developing new ones.
13. Raise awareness among decision-makers and the public of the Protocol and its benefits and build adequate national implementation capacities of competent public authorities responsible for undertaking strategic environmental assessment, environmental and health authorities to be consulted and assessment experts/practitioners.
14. Ensure early, timely and effective consultations of environmental and health authorities and public participation, including, as needed, in a transboundary context – when all options are still open.
15. Strengthen quality control measures to improve environmental reports, and further develop monitoring.
16. Create incentives for mainstreaming consideration of Sustainable Development Goals in strategic environmental assessment, including translating the Goals that are relevant to a project or plan into context-specific criteria and subsequently applying them as benchmarks.

V. Do you want to know more? (further reading) (max. 150 words)

17. For further information on the Protocol, please contact the ECE Secretariat to the Protocol, based in Geneva (eia.conv@un.org) and/or visit the Protocol's home page (www.unece.org/env/eia/eia.html and www.unece.org/env/eia/sea_protocol.html). Selected sources of information accessible from the homepage include the following:

- (a) Text of the Protocol;
- (b) Status of ratification;
- (c) Introductory video on the Protocol;
- (d) Publications, for example:

- Resource Manual to Support Application of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment;
 - Simplified Resource Manual to Support Application of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment;
 - Good Practice Recommendations on Public Participation in Strategic Environmental Assessment;
 - Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment: Facts and Benefits;
 - Guidance on Land-Use Planning, the Siting of Hazardous Activities and related Safety Aspects;
 - Application of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment - Manual for Trainers;
 - Practical guidance on reforming legal and institutional structures with regard to the application of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- (e) Opinions of the Implementation Committee, cases and other material on review of compliance under the Protocol;
- (f) National reports and reviews of implementation;
- (g) Format for notification under the Protocol;
- (h) Lists of points of contact regarding notification and of focal points for administrative matters;
- (i) Overview of the bodies under the Protocol;
- (j) Decisions by the Meetings of the Parties;
- (k) Calendar of meetings and events, including official meetings and capacity-building events.
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