

Introduction to the side-event

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Thank you, Sir, for your welcoming words and, more broadly, for Switzerland's substantial support for building capacity in impact assessment in Central Asia and Azerbaijan.

I would like to add my warm welcome to you, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. And please do quietly help yourselves to refreshments during this side-event.

After my colleagues from UNDP and UNEP have added a few words about their respective programmes for impact assessment, we will hear a series of very short technical presentations providing diverse perspectives on impact assessment in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, after which my Director, Mr Marco Keiner, has kindly offered to moderate a discussion with the presenters forming a panel to answer your questions. This will be the most useful element of the side-event and I would like to encourage you to contribute actively to that discussion. And please do hold back with your questions until the discussion.

From the side-event announcement you will have seen that UNECE member States and the European Union have recognized the importance and uniqueness of strategic environmental assessment as an instrument for planning and policymaking related to greening the economy. This event is intended to examine how strategic environmental assessment and other impact assessment methodologies really contribute to mainstreaming the environment into economic development.

We will hear about project-level impact assessment where, though opportunities to direct development towards sustainability are limited, the public and the authorities can promote more environmentally-benign economic development. We will also hear about the integration of the environment, and socio-economic concerns, into more strategic decision-making, into national and local planning processes that **can** “green the economy” and **can** direct economic development towards sustainability.

If you look at the chapter on the green economy in the Assessment of Assessments publication, you will see that the first finding is that “A framework to promote a green economy is lacking. Currently, assessments are largely driven from the bottom-up and do not generally form part of a clear 'top-down' framework.”

Project-level environmental impact assessment is a reflection of that bottom-up approach. Strategic environmental assessment does address higher-level decision-making in plans and programmes, and can form part of a clear 'top-down' framework, but the full potential of such assessments will not be realized without its application to policy-level decisions.

But what we have been doing so far is developing capacity bottom-up: you will hear more about the Swiss programme to build capacity in environmental impact assessment in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. You may also have seen the report on the implementation of the Belgrade Initiative on Strategic Environmental Assessment. This Initiative was proposed by Armenia, Belarus and the Republic of Moldova, and noted with interest by the previous Ministerial Conference, in Belgrade. You may see from that report that, though the Initiative has encountered resourcing difficulties, it has progressed. And the presentations by Azerbaijan and Belarus and on the Crimea will demonstrate this.

I would like to conclude this introduction by thanking you for your attention and by encouraging you once again to contribute to the discussion that will follow the presentations.
