

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

Ninth meeting

Geneva, 24–26 August 2020

Item 4 (a) of the provisional agenda

Preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties:

Practical arrangements

Preparations for the next sessions of the Meetings of the Parties

Note by the secretariat, as agreed by the Bureau

Summary

The present note contains a time schedule for the preparation of the eighth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context and the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (Vilnius, 8–11 December 2020), as agreed by the Bureau. It also presents a list of draft decisions and documents for the sessions, as revised by the Bureau based on comments by the Working Group on Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment at its eighth meeting (Geneva, 26–28 November 2019).

The Working Group is expected to review and comment the information.

In addition, for consideration and agreement by the Working Group, the chapter IV of the document presents the Bureau's recommendations regarding the panel discussions, the high-level event and a possible side event to be held during the Meetings of the Parties' next sessions. Delegations are invited to comment and suggest speakers and moderators by 30 June. The Working Group may also wish to refer to a separate summary table on the topics of the panels and/or seminars held this far in 2001–2019 that the secretariat has compiled.

The provisional annotated agenda, as revised by the Bureau, is contained in a separate document (ECE/MP.EIA/WG.2/2020/INF.5) for agreement by the Working Group.

I. Indicative time schedule for the preparatory work

Activity	Responsible	Deadline/Date in 2020
2020		
Bureau meeting to agree on the WG9 agenda and documents	Bureau and the secretariat	25–26 February + subsequent written consultations
Implementation Committee (47 th session)	Implementation Committee	17–20 March
Comments on the official documents (available since 1 April)	All delegations	By 30 June
Initial information on pledged financial contributions for 2021–2023	Parties + other delegations	By 30 June
Input and speakers for the high-level event and the general segment's panel	All delegations	By 30 June
Nominations for chairing the general and high-level segments	Parties	By 30 June
Initial nominations for officers to be elected for the treaty bodies 2021-23	Parties	By 30 June
Availability of the draft LTE Guidance for comments	Ad hoc working group	By 30 June
Comments on the draft LTE guidance	All delegations	By 3 August
<i>Ad hoc working group on LTE of NPPs</i>	<i>Ad hoc group</i>	<i>Espoo, Finland, 22–23 June (tbc)</i>
Working Group on EIA and SEA (9 th meeting) to agree on the draft MOP agenda and documents etc.	Working Group	24–26 August <i>(Official docs available since 1 April; draft compliance decisions since 15 April)</i>
Implementation Committee (48 th session)	Implementation Committee	1–4 September
Webpages with practical + logistical information on the MOP sessions	Host country	As of 8 September (3 months before)
Official draft MOP agenda and documents	Secretariat and the Bureau (consulted electronically)	For editing by 14 September; Available (in English) by 1 October
Mailing of invitation letters	Secretariat	By mid-September
Submission of financial support forms to ECE	Delegations eligible for financial support	By 20 October
On-line registration	All delegations	By 20 October
Confirmed information on pledged financial contributions 2021–2023	All Parties and other delegations	By 2 November (5 weeks before the MOPs)
Confirmed information on officers to be elected for the treaty bodies	All Parties and other delegations	By 2 November
Comments to the official documents	All delegations	By 16 November (3 weeks before the MOPs)
Submission of credentials (full powers) to UNECE	All delegations	Copies to the secretariat by 24 November; original to be presented before opening of the MOP sessions
Bureau meeting	Bureau	Vilnius, 7 December (10:00–noon)
Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol (MOP8 and MOP/MOP4)	Meetings of the Parties	Vilnius, 8–11 December 2020

II. List of draft decisions to be considered by the Meetings of the Parties

<i>Title</i>	<i>MOP8</i>	<i>MOP/MOP4</i>	<i>Observations</i>
<i>Joint decisions</i>			
Financial arrangements for 2021–2023	VIII/1	IV/1	
Adoption of the workplan	VIII/2	IV/2	
Long term-strategy and the action plan for the Convention and its Protocol	VIII/3	IV/3	
<i>MOP decisions</i>			
General issues of compliance with the Convention	VIII/4		
Compliance by Armenia with its obligations under the Convention in respect of its national legislation	VIII/4 a		
Compliance by Azerbaijan with its obligations under the Convention in respect of its national legislation	VIII/4 b		
Compliance by Belarus with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets	VIII/4 c		
Compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the Danube-Black Sea Deep Water Navigation Canal in the Ukrainian sector of the Danube Delta	VIII/4 d		
Compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention in respect of extension of the lifetime of the Rivne nuclear power plant	VIII/4 e		
Reporting and review of implementation of the Convention	VIII/5		
Applicability of the Convention to the life-time extension of nuclear power plants	VIII/6		
<i>MOP/MOP decisions</i>			
General issues of compliance with the Protocol		IV/4	
Reporting and review of implementation of the Protocol		IV/5	
Assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment		IV/6	

II. Draft list of official documents

(Document titles and their symbols may still be subject to changes)

1. Joint MOP8 and MOP/MOP4 documents

- Provisional agenda (ECE/MP.EIA/29– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/12)
- Report of the eighth and the fourth sessions of the Meetings of the Parties to the Convention and the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/30– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/13) (– Post session)
- Draft joint decisions by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention and the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/1– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/1)
- Report on the budget and financial arrangements 2017–2020 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/2– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/2)
- Long-term strategy and an action plan for the Convention and the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/3– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/3)
- Report on the activities of the Implementation Committee (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/4–ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/4)
- Draft Vilnius declaration (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/5– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/5)
- Summary report on the implementation of technical assistance and capacity-building activities in the period from June 2017- September 2020 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/6– ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/6)

2. MOP 8 documents

- Draft decisions by the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/7)
- Draft sixth review of implementation of the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/8)
- Guidance on the applicability of the Convention to the lifetime extension of nuclear power plants (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/9)
- Draft decision VIII/4 on the general issues of compliance with the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/10)
- Draft decision VIII/4a on compliance by Armenia with its obligations under the Convention in respect of its national legislation (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/11)
- Draft decision VIII/4b on compliance by Azerbaijan with its obligations under the Convention in respect of its national legislation (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/12)
- Draft decision VIII/4c on compliance by Belarus with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/13)

- Draft decision VIII/4d on compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention in respect of the Danube-Black Sea Deep Water Navigation Canal in the Ukrainian sector of the Danube Delta (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/14)
- Draft decision VIII/4e on compliance by Ukraine with its obligations under the Convention in respect of extension of the lifetime of the Rivne nuclear power plant (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/15)
- [Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary context (FasTips) (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/16)]

3. MOP/MOP 4 documents

- Draft decisions by the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/7)
- Draft third review of implementation of the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/8)
- Draft decision on general issues of compliance with the Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/9)
- Guidance on assessing health impacts in strategic environmental assessment (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/10)
- [Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (FasTips) (ECE/MP.EIA/SEA/2020/11)]

III. Draft list of informal documents for the MOPs

- Informal notes on the agenda (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.1)
- Status of ratification of the Convention, its amendments and its Protocol (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.2)
- Status of contributions to the trust fund (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.3)
- Information on pledged contributions for the period 2021–2023 (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.4)
- Informal assessment of the completion of the workplan (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.5)
- Information note for the panel discussion on [sustainable infrastructure, including energy transition] (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.6)
- Informal list of nominations and proposed election criteria (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.7)
- Provisional schedule of meetings (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.8)
- Information note on the high-level event to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the Convention (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.9)
- [Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary context (FasTips) (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.10)]
- [Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment (FasTips) (ECE/MP.EIA/2020/INF.11)]

IV. Panel discussions at the general and high-level segments

A. General segment

1. Relevant considerations by the Working Group in November 2019

1. At its last meeting (Geneva, 26–28 November 2019), based on proposals by the Bureau, the Working Group had suggested that the panel discussions to be held during the general segment of the Meetings of the Parties' next sessions (Vilnius, 8–11 December 2020) focus on the role of strategic environmental assessment in connection with one of the following topics: smart and sustainable cities; sustainable infrastructure; energy transition; or circular economy.

2. The Working Group had invited delegations to comment on the proposed topics, and to suggest possible speakers and facilitators for the panels, and to volunteer as lead countries and organizations for the organization of the panel discussions. It also requested the Bureau to further consider the topics and to narrow them down to two key priority topics for the Working Group to decide on at its next meeting (Geneva, 24–26 August 2020).

3. Following the Working Group's meeting, only the delegation of the European Union submitted written comments regarding the panel discussions. It considered possible to address several of the topics, some through a panel discussion and some as a side event. It invited the Bureau to consider the following two criteria when prioritizing the topics:

(a) The possibility of the topic to trigger a discussion related either to projects with transboundary environmental impacts, or to the planning of plans and programmes (strategic environmental assessment);

(b) The potential of the topic to attract political attention.

4. Additionally, the European Union delegation made the following comments to the initially proposed topics:

(a) Role of SEA for smart and sustainable cities, including to address SDGs, climate change and health considerations in urban planning: Considering the scope of the Protocol on SEA, the topic is interesting due to its link to climate change and health;

(b) Greening of China's Belt and Road Initiative: role of SEA and transboundary EIA of infrastructure planning and projects (sustainable infrastructure):

(i) The topic covers a wide range of infrastructure activities undertaken between China, Central Asia and Europe (now also expanding e.g. to the Arctic, Africa and Latin America). Hence, this provides a good margin for touching upon the global outreach of the Protocol, as well as the Convention. The topic can attract the attention of various stakeholders, including business, project developers and IFIs;

(ii) Alternative ways to formulate the topic could be "Belt and Road Initiative - the role of SEA and transboundary EIA of infrastructure planning and projects" or "Sustainable infrastructure - role of SEA and transboundary EIA of infrastructure planning and projects", to attract greater interest among more states, and to neutralize the topic;

(c) Promoting circular economy through environmental assessment of related planning and projects (e.g. regarding waste): the EU delegation is of the view that energy transition could be considered as a possible topic instead;

(d) Energy transition: A topical issue in many Parties to the Convention.

2. Recommendation of the Bureau: a panel discussion on sustainable infrastructure, covering also energy transition

5. As the Working Group had agreed to devote the high-level segment of the Meetings of the Parties' sessions to the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the Convention's adoption, the Bureau recommended that the general segment's panel discussions focus predominantly on the application of the Protocol. Moreover, the Protocol will also have an anniversary in 2020, having entered into force ten years ago, in 2010.

6. The Bureau recommended that the panel discussions focus on the role of strategic environmental assessment for sustainable infrastructure, covering in particular the Protocol's application to energy and transport infrastructure planning. The panel would cover key issues such as energy transition, Belt and Road Initiative, the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) corridor and climate change.

7. The Bureau proposed that the panellists be invited to:

(a) Discuss how to enhance a more systematic and holistic application of SEA to all infrastructure development planning, as a means for preventing and mitigating possible adverse environmental impacts early in the planning stage;

(b) Share good practice examples;

(c) Explore ways for expanding the awareness and the application of the Protocol on SEA to infrastructure development planning within and beyond the ECE region.

8. The panelists could include representatives of Parties, including from Central Asia, but also of civil society, and possibly also of International Financial Institutions, and relevant international and regional organizations, referring to relevant initiatives, such as the Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership¹ launched by the UN Environment in 2018 as a platform to promote and support integrated approaches to sustainable infrastructure planning and development. The Bureau however emphasized that the panelists should mainly focus on the implementation of the Protocol on SEA, instead of other instruments or initiatives.

9. The Bureau also noted that one of the two main themes selected for the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (Nicosia, 3–5 November 2021) was about sustainable infrastructure: "Greening the economy in the pan-European region: working towards sustainable infrastructure". It agreed that the outcomes of the panel and other relevant activities under the Espoo Convention and its Protocol should be reported at the Ministerial Conference to enhance the visibility of the treaties and to advocate their role in addressing national, regional and global challenges.

10. Acknowledging that that topic of sustainable infrastructure, including energy transition, was likely to be of interest also to ministers and other heads of delegations, the Bureau agreed that the panel discussion should be organized at the very end of the general segment, that is, in the afternoon of Thursday, 10 December. That would allow those heads of delegations that planned to travel to Vilnius for the high-level segment of Friday, 11 December, to consider arriving sufficiently early on the day before to also attend the general segment's panel discussions.

Background information

11. As a basis for its deliberations, the Bureau considered some background information provided by the secretariat, including the following excerpt from a draft inter-

¹ <https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/green-economy/what-we-do/economic-and-fiscal-policy/sustainable-infrastructure>

agency statement on sustainable infrastructure and how an integrated approach can build bridges towards Agenda 2030.²

Industry and innovation drive infrastructure development and consequently, economic growth. Resilient infrastructure is an essential foundation for achieving growth, sustainable development and addressing societal well-being. Furthermore, investing in infrastructure provides opportunities for employment creation, income generation and economic growth.

At the same time, transport and water systems, industrial facilities, extractive industries, power plants and other infrastructure affect the environment. Infrastructure is also itself threatened by environmental and climate change-related risks. If poorly conceived, and not subject to a prior assessment of its potential environmental and health impacts, infrastructure may undermine sustainable development. Approximately 70% of greenhouse gases, including air pollutants, are linked to the construction and operation of infrastructure. In turn, the increasingly visible effects of climate change can pose major threats to infrastructure; buildings in coastal areas are vulnerable to sea level rise and nuclear power must shut down when the ambient temperature of the cooling water (from rivers, lakes and the sea) upon which they depend, rises beyond a certain level. Failure of infrastructure and accidents can also cause the loss of lives and severe damage to human health. Natural hazards triggering technological accidents events are on the rise and, in light of the expected increase in intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, existing and planned infrastructure developments need to be risk-informed, safely operated and resilient. Furthermore, the rejection of infrastructure projects at late stages due to lack of effective stakeholder consultation and public participation in their development lead to costly mitigation measures and, in many occasions, to social protests, or, in case of negative cross border impacts, can result to international tensions.

Effective participation of the public, including local communities, and, as needed public in other concerned countries, should be ensured at all stages of infrastructure development and its impact assessment. Planners should apply a mitigation hierarchy that prioritises efforts to avoid negative environmental impacts, followed by minimisation, then restoration, with offsetting as a last resort. Application of the mitigation hierarchy is most effective at the earliest stages of planning, when avoidance and minimization options are still cost-effective and politically feasible.

12. The Bureau also noted that **the Belt and Road Initiative** will importantly impact many countries in the ECE region and beyond, presenting both opportunities and risks. It would therefore be important and topical to address it during the panel discussions. The Initiative is expected to bring trillions of dollars of investment to over 60 countries, primarily in Asia and Europe. It will help meet infrastructure needs for transportation, communication, energy supply and industry, and presents a major opportunity to enhance connectivity and economic prosperity as well as to boost socio-economic and institutional development and regional cooperation for example in Central Asia. If investments in carbon-intensive infrastructure can be avoided, the initiative is an excellent opportunity for countries to develop green infrastructure, clean energy and clean technology and human capital that will help to work towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. At the same time, important efforts will be needed to green the Belt and Road initiative by ensuring that environmental safeguards are in place, and that the related plans and projects include effective stakeholder engagement. In absence of such safeguards, substantial and irreversible environmental impacts are likely (including contamination of water, air

² The finalized document is available at:

https://www.greengrowthknowledge.org/sites/default/files/Interagency%20Statement%20On%20Sustainable%20Infrastructure_UN%20Environment.pdf

pollution and impact on climate; destruction and fragmentation of habitats, nature reserves and migratory paths, deforestation and soil erosion.)

13. The Bureau agreed that the panel should also cover the role of SEA (and EIA) in promoting **energy transition**, as that was key for meeting the Paris Agreement objectives and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 7 on sustainable energy. The transformation of the energy sector from fossil-based to zero-carbon, was largely motivated by the need to reduce energy-related CO₂ emissions to limit climate change, and required urgent action, at national, regional and global scale. These would importantly include renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. The Bureau pointed out that six past panels or seminars have focused on the application of the Convention and the Protocol to energy related activities and that climate change had been discussed at the at the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties held in Minsk on 2017. It recommended therefore, that the further discussions on the topic of energy would refer to the past ones. As needed Cooperation and input from the ECE Sustainable Development Division could again be sought.

B. High-level segment

14. The Bureau also discussed the preparation and the contents of the Convention's high-level 30-year anniversary event, recommending the following:

- (a) The preparation by the secretariat of a video presenting the Convention and its benefits;
- (b) Obtaining a video message from the United Nation's Secretary General on the Convention;
- (c) Resources permitting, the preparation of another video that would illustrate key people, major events and deliverables from the Convention's past and present, featuring, for example: the Chairs of the treaty bodies; Meetings of the Parties' sessions and their hosts; the secretaries to the Convention; and the publications issued. The Bureau called for volunteering Parties or stakeholders to take on the preparation of the video;
- (d) Soliciting interventions by invited high-level representatives of Parties, future Parties and stakeholders representing different sub-regions, highlighting the Convention's benefits to their countries and sub-regions.

C. A possible side event on (smart and) sustainable cities

15. The Bureau agreed that the contribution of the Protocol on SEA to (smart and) sustainable cities would be another particularly interesting topic, which was linked to several topics of relevance for the application of the Protocol such as, climate change, health, and Sustainable Development Goals. The Bureau proposed that that theme be addressed during a possible side event – provided that volunteering lead countries or organizations to organize it in the margins of the sessions would be identified.

16. While cities are crucial hubs for the economic and technological development, they have, at the same time, significant environmental, health, and climate change impacts. Many cities and communities have embarked on a more sustainable path of urban and local development and are therefore important actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. The Protocol, in turn, is a key instrument for integrating environmental, including health considerations into regional development and town/urban planning at early stages of the decision-making - facilitating an integrated approach to sustainable urban development. It can help promoting more efficient and sustainable planning of urban transport, water and energy infrastructure, contributing to the reduction of pollution and waste generation, and to promoting sustainable mobility.

18. Town and country planning and land use are fields where SEA is applied the most, and, therefore, Parties and stakeholders would have much practical experience to share. At the same time, the plans at urban (local) level, have this far not yet been focused on by the treaty bodies.

19. The possible side event on sustainable cities could provide a forum for

(a) The exchange of good practices in the application of SEA to urban planning (town and land-use or regional development planning);

(b) Addressing existing challenges, in general, or regarding specific methodological aspects, for example for description of alternatives etc., or in relation to coordination and communication between tiers of government or in raising awareness of the local level about the Protocol and its application;

(c) Sharing and identifying ways to overcome the challenges;

(d) Drawing conclusions and recommendations, including on possible follow-up activities for the next intersessional period(s).

20. To make use of synergies with other relevant ECE sub-programmes, the event could be organised with inputs from the ECE Housing and Land Management Department that works with the association of Mayors of ECE region and the joint ECE and WHO Transport Environment Health Pan-European Programme.

21. The topic would also be of interest to countries from outside the ECE region struggle with urban pollution and that would benefit from the good practice in the ECE region to address it. A country from Asia or from Central America could be invited to share their concerns and experience in this respect. (As needed, UNEP's Cities and LifeStyles Unit that works on a global scale could be contacted for inputs).
