

# **TOWARDS A FULLY-FLEDGED SEA AND EIA SYSTEM IN GEORGIA: FINAL EVENT ON SEA AND EIA COMPONENT WITHIN THE EAP GREEN PROJECT**

## **EVENT REPORT**



26 APRIL 2017  
TBILISI, GEORGIA



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## 1. Background

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is seen as an essential planning tool for an environmentally sustainable economic development, and can thus concretely support country's efforts in greening its economy. It is a step-by-step procedure to integrate green economy targets and other sustainability issues into strategic planning and decision-making to ensure that environmental and health implications of decisions are taken into account before they are made. A SEA is applied to governmental plans, programmes, or policy documents in accordance with requirements of the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention (Protocol on SEA) and the EU SEA Directive. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) contributes to environmentally-sound and sustainable development at the level of specific projects. EIA has been developed as a tool for enhancing positive environmental and health effects of development proposals while preventing, reducing or offsetting the adverse ones of a project such as for transport infrastructure (e.g. highways, airports, industrial facilities, energy plants). As in other countries in the region, necessary investments in many economic sectors in Georgia are expected to result in a number of specific developments. However, it is important to ensure that these project activities are implemented in a way which does not present any major risks to the environment and human health. Only then can it be considered as a way towards green economy.

Introducing and establishing SEA and EIA systems shall enable to use these tools to ensure sound economic development choices that benefit human health and the environment alike.

The "Greening Economies in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) project assists six countries of the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership including Georgia in progressing faster towards a green economy framework.<sup>1</sup> SEA and EIA have been promoted within the EaP GREEN as tools to integrate green economy targets and other sustainability issues into strategic and project-related decision-making to ensure that environmental and health implications of decisions are taken into account before they are made.

Since 2013, the UNECE within the EaP GREEN framework has been assisting Georgia in developing the national SEA and EIA system. The assistance has been focusing on following issues:

- Improving the national legislative and institutional framework for SEA and EIA to fully comply with the Convention, the Protocol, and the EU SEA and EIA Directives;
- Defining roles and responsibilities of various authorities in the EIA and SEA processes;
- Building capacities for SEA and EIA application, including implementation of SEA pilot and developing the national guidelines on application of SEA and EIA procedures;
- Raising awareness and common understanding of the EIA and SEA benefits at national and local levels and in different sectors, including the benefits of public participation and the consultation of relevant authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> The EaP GREEN programme is implemented with the financial support of the European Union and other donors, and is jointly implemented by the four partner organisations: OECD, UN Environment, UNECE and UNIDO. More information can be found at <http://www.green-economies-eap.org/>.



## 2. Objectives and approach

The objective of the final event was to:

- To present the outcomes and results regarding SEA and EIA achieved within the EaP GREEN;
- To summarize the key principles of efficient SEA and EIA practice and its benefits;
- To discuss priorities and needs regarding further development of SEA and EIA system in the country.

The conclusions from the discussion will be integrated in the SEA/EIA capacity development strategy to be drafted in order to outline next steps and actions towards national SEA and EIA system meeting the requirements of international legal framework – especially the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, and EU SEA and EIA Directive.

The event was organized by the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia (Ministry) in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and ‘Georgia’s Environmental Outlook’ (GEO) in the framework of the EaP GREEN.

The workshop invited representatives of all relevant stakeholders – environmental and health authorities, planning agencies and institutes, local authorities, experts and practitioners, as well as representatives of NGOs.

As it can be seen in the agenda (Annex I to this report), the event combined presentations by the representatives of the Ministry and the international experts with discussions in groups and presenting results of the discussion at the plenary meeting.



### 3. Minutes of the event

The event was opened by Ms. Maia Bitadze, the Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia. In her speech, she emphasized importance of introducing and applying SEA and EIA in Georgia and acknowledged the support provided by the UNECE secretariat within the EaP GREEN project. She informed auditorium that the draft Environmental Assessment Code successfully passed the first reading in the Parliament.

Mr. Mr. Alvaro Ortega Aparacio, Project Manager – Environment and Rural Development, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, welcomed the participants on behalf of the EU, and mentioned a successful cooperation between the EaP GREEN project and the EU activities in Georgia. He also highlighted the adoption of the Environmental Assessment Code as on the key steps to establish a SEA/EIA system in the country enabling the practical application of both tools in line with international legislative framework and a good practice.

Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, UNECE consultant, introduced the agenda, and provided a brief overview of the UNECE technical assistance within EaP GREEN. He explained main topics and priorities addressed within the EaP GREEN regarding SEA and EIA in Georgia and summarized national training and capacity building events. He mentioned also sub-regional events – the study tour to the Czech Republic (2014), and the sub-regional conference organised in Georgia (Kakheti) in November 2015.

In following presentation, Mr. Matthew Cashmore, Senior Lecturer, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala, introduced main elements of a well-developed SEA and EIA system, i.e.:

- Procedural framework;
- Institutions and capacity;
- A strong system of quality control; and
- Political support.

Mr. Cashmore concluded that in a well-developed SEA/EIA system:

- The legislative framework is in line with international expectations.
- SEA/EIA is recognized as a standard practice.
- Adequate institutional capacity for coordination, effective administration and for conducting SEAs and EIAs.
- Quality is high and the results are accepted by relevant stakeholders/decision-makers.
- The system operates transparently and decision makers are accountable.
- There is strong political support for the system.

After the coffee break, Ms. Bitadze presented an overview of the development of SEA and EIA system in Georgia since 2013 and major results and achievements. She also mentioned remaining challenges for establishing a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system, including a need for further capacity building for the environmental and health authorities, planning agencies, as well as practitioners and consultants.



In his introduction to the group work, Mr. Smutny provided that the results of the group work shall be used in developing the capacity building strategy on SEA and EIA. He explained that the capacity building strategy should

- Identify existing challenges in current SEA and EIA system and practice in Georgia;
- Outline priorities (and possibly also specific activities) for further capacity building on SEA and EIA in Georgia;
- Determine main target groups for capacity building.

The participants, divided in four groups, were invited to discuss following questions:

- What are the main existing challenges related to SEA/EIA in Georgia and the ways to overcome them?
- What are the benefits and costs of application of SEA/EIA in Georgia?
- What needs to be done to make SEA and EIA operational (i.e. that is it applied as a standard tool)? You may suggest:
- Three priorities for further capacity building on SEA/EIA
- Three specific actions/activities to be organized in 2017 – 2018

After the group discussion, each group presented their opinion (see section 4 of this report).

At the end of the event, Ms. Tamar Sharashidze, Head of Environmental Impact Permits Department, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Georgia, and Mr. Martin Smutny, thanked the participants for their active involvement, and informed them that the draft capacity building strategy will be circulated for their comments in coming weeks.



## 4. Conclusions

Following conclusions can be summarized from the discussions within the event:

Further development of the SEA system in Georgia would require continuation of capacity building to coordinate and carry out SEA procedures – environmental and health authorities, planning agencies, as well as experts and practitioners can be considered as the key target groups. Awareness raising on SEA benefits and the importance of public participation among decision-makers and the public, respectively, is also needed. For this, pilot SEAs may provide opportunity for hands-on experience for relevant stakeholders and can be efficiently combined with trainings and workshops.

Similarly, despite the progress made, further effort is needed to establish an EIA system in Georgia ensuring EIA is applied as a standard tool for projects which may have significant impacts on environment and health. The priorities would include support to EIA practitioners in using relevant methods and tools for evaluating the likely impacts, enhancement of the quality control in EIA, and arrangements for participation of the health authorities in EIA processes.

As a result of the group work, following specific points were mentioned:

There are certain challenges that need to be addressed after enactment of the new Environmental Assessment Code (following the results of the discussions in groups):

- Lack of information on EIA among the developers;
- Increased number of SEA and EIA cases may present a problem for capacity of the Ministry, decentralisation of SEA/EIA coordination and management might be considered;
- There is limited capacity of consultancy companies and practitioners to carry out SEA and EIA (again, increased demand can be expected after adoption of the Code);
- There is a lack of data, in particular spatial/GIS data;
- The costs of additional steps in SEA/EIA procedures (screening, scoping, potential transboundary consultations, more extensive public consultations) stipulated by the Code and costs related to the expert committees need to be considered in further budgeting;

To address the challenges, several potential activities were suggested:

- The database of SEA and EIA cases should be established;
- The training scheme for environmental and health authorities and the practitioners should be developed;
- Preparing the list of sensitive environmental and health issues for each region with regular updated as a basis for SEA and EIA;
- Introducing twinning project(s) i.e. inviting expert to be involved in the operations of the Ministry;
- A scheme of qualification/accreditation for SEA/EIA experts should be considered, optimally linked to the training and capacity development system;
- Planning agencies and local self-government need to be involved in further awareness raising on SEA and EIA.



It can be also concluded that participants appreciated information on preparation of the capacity development strategy. They considered it as useful document to determine priorities for further SEA and EIA development in Georgia.





## 5. Public visibility of the event

In order to ensure wide pre- and postevent promotion the following activities were implemented:

- Branded bags and folders were developed, printed and disseminated among all participants;
- Press release was developed and disseminated;
- All national media channels covered the event (e.g. <https://www.facebook.com/MOEgeorgia/videos/1367465869977046/> )
- Post event release was developed in English and Georgian languages and disseminated via CENN network (more than 20,000 subscribers)
- Information about the event were widely distributed in electronic and social media:
  - The Facebook profile (more than 97 000 likes) of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection: [https://www.facebook.com/pg/MOEgeorgia/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=1367442686646031](https://www.facebook.com/pg/MOEgeorgia/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1367442686646031)
  - Official web-site of Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection: <http://www.moe.gov.ge/ka/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%98%E1%83%90%E1%83%A%E1%83%9A%E1%83%94%E1%83%94%E1%83%91%E1%83%98/2017-04-28-maia-bitadzem-garemosdacviti>
  - Facebook page of GEO (Georgia's Environmental Outlook): [https://www.facebook.com/pg/GEO-1127131397300965/photos/?tab=album&album\\_id=1644170388930394](https://www.facebook.com/pg/GEO-1127131397300965/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1644170388930394)



## Annexes

### Annex I: Agenda

<b>09.30 – 10.00</b>	<b>Registration of participants and welcome coffee</b>
<b>10.00 – 10.15</b>	<p><b>Opening of the workshop and welcome of the participants</b></p> <p><i>Ms. Maia Bitadze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection</i></p> <p><i>Mr. Alvaro Ortega Aparacio, Project Manager – Environment and Rural Development, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia</i></p>
<b>10.15 – 10.40</b>	<p><b>The progress we have made – an overview of the development of SEA and EIA system in Georgia since 2013, major results and achievement</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by Ms. Maia Bitadze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
<b>10.40 – 11.00</b>	<p><b>Overview of the UNECE technical assistance within EaP GREEN</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, UNECE consultant</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
<b>11.00 – 11.45</b>	<p><b>Main elements of a well-developed SEA and EIA system – what is important for efficient practice, examples from EU countries</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by Mr. Matthew Cashmore, Senior Lecturer, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Uppsala</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
<b>11.45 – 12.15</b>	<b>Coffee break</b>
<b>12.15 – 12.35</b>	<p><b>What needs to be further enhanced – remaining challenges for establishing a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system</b></p> <p><i>Presentation by the representative of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
<b>12.35 – 13.45</b>	<p><b>Developing SEA/EIA capacity development strategy</b></p> <p><i>Introduction by Mr. Martin Smutny</i></p> <p><i>Group work – identification of priorities and needs to further develop national SEA and EIA system</i></p> <p><i>Presentation of results</i></p>
<b>13.45 – 14.00</b>	<p><b>Closing remarks – way forward</b></p> <p><i>Ms. Maia Bitadze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Protection</i></p>



	<i>Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i>
<b>14.00</b>	<b>Lunch</b>



## Annex II: List of participants

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### **‘Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Georgia’ Final event on SEA and EIA component within the EaP GREEN**

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Start Day: April 26, 2017

Participants: 32

Female participants: 20

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