

Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Armenia

Final Event on SEA and EIA Component within the EaP Green

22 and 26 December 2017

Venue: Bass Boutique Hotel and Nor Dzoraberd” Complex, Yerevan, Armenia



Event Report

February 2018

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1. Background information

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is seen as an essential planning tool for an environmentally sustainable economic development, which can support countries in greening their 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. 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.

The EaP GREEN project (Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood) was launched in 2013 to support the six European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine – to progress faster towards a green economy through better management of natural capital supporting a higher economic productivity and competitiveness. The EaP GREEN countries made their commitments related to the transition towards a green economy in the 2011 and 2013 Declarations of the EU Eastern Partnership Summits and on other international fora.

The EaP GREEN has supported countries in developing methodological, legal, and conceptual material based on international good practice adapted to the country conditions and needs. The EaP GREEN has been jointly implemented by four international organizations: the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The project has been funded by the European Union, implementing organisations, and supported by several EU and OECD countries.

Armenia became a Party to the Protocol on SEA in 2014. It is one of the first countries in the Eastern European and Caucasian region to join the SEA Protocol to the UNECE Espoo Convention on EIA. Since 2013, Armenia, with the support from the EaP GREEN project, is gradually introducing the SEA elements into the planning and permitting systems. UNECE secretariat within the framework of the EaP GREEN has complemented the legal drafting process mainly by raising awareness among national, local and sectoral authorities about SEA process and its benefits; building national and local capacities on practical application of SEA; and assisting the country in defining roles and responsibilities of various authorities in the SEA process.

The workshop '*Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Armenia*' was the final event within the framework of the EaP GREEN in Armenia and was delivered in two half-day events on 22 and 26 December 2017.¹

¹ Original planning had been to organize the event as one-day workshop, however at request of the Ministry of Nature Protection, as well as per official correspondence between the Ministry and UNECE Secretariat, the event was delivered in two parts in order to reach a wider spectrum of stakeholders.

2. Objectives of the event and approach

The objectives of the final event were:

- 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 final events gathered 50 participants altogether (see Annex 1 to this report for both lists of participants) including the representatives of the central authorities (ministries) responsible for sectoral planning, other relevant governmental agencies, experts / EIA and SEA practitioners, and environmental NGOs.

The agendas of the event (see Annex 2 to this report) included the presentations on SEA and EIA activities implemented in Armenia within the EaP GREEN, the summary of main achievements and result, and the pre-requisites for the effective SEA and EIA systems. It also covered facilitated discussions on remaining challenges and actions need to establish a full-fledged SEA and EIA system in the country.

The meetings were organized by the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia in cooperation with the UNECE within the framework of the EaP GREEN. The logistical support was provided by the REC Caucasus Armenia Branch Office.

3. Minutes of the event

3.1 Summary of the first part of the event (22 December 2017)

The meeting was opened by Deputy Minister of Nature Protection, Khachik Hakobyan who in his welcoming speech outlined that the results of the EaP GREEN, including the EIA and SEA component, were recently discussed in Brussels and finalized together with the implementing agencies. He mentioned the results of the EaP GREEN project in Armenia were visible, measureable and appreciated. He thanked four implementing agencies of the EaP GREEN and also the Regional environmental center for Caucasus that served as a national partner for the EaP GREEN activities. He mentioned that the Ministry of the Nature Protection and the REC C have been successful in ensuring collaboration between national and international expert teams, as well as in finding solutions on strategic tasks set in the frames of the project.

Mr. Khachik Hakobyan elaborated that Armenia had the SEA procedure inserted in the national law of 2014 and that the SEA procedure and EIA were separated one from another. As part of the EaP GREEN activities, the SEA procedure was detailed in a separate Draft Decision of the Government of Armenia, elaborated by the international and national expert group. He also noted that there was a technical, but a serious obstacle to making SEA a routine in Armenia, i.e., in many cases the preparation of strategic documents, policies and policy documents was planned within the work plan of each agency, while funds needed for SEA were not included in the budget of these agencies.

Mr. Khachik Hakobyan highlighted that that the Ministry of Nature Protection had taken every effort to raise awareness on the need for SEA among state bodies and other stakeholders, as well as about their obligations/responsibilities in the course of SEA. It was clear that a high level of awareness was a very important pre-condition for successful implementation of SEA. The work would continue to improve public awareness about the SEA/ EIA law, procedures, practice, and to clarify the role of business sector in this process. In addition, it would be necessary to help the practitioners in different sectors to learn more about SEA and EIA procedures, stages, documentation and best practice, and for this, to prepare a new guidance documentation for sectoral ministries and agencies involved in the SEA and EIA process. Overall, he stressed that it was very important to continue raising awareness on SEA in Armenia to avoid malfunctioning of the law and support its implementation in practice.



Mr. Khachik Hakobyan explained that the EU approved a new grant of 19 million euros to six eastern partner countries so that the implementation of the second phase of the new green economy programme could start in 2018. At the end of his speech, Mr. Khachik Hakobyan thanked the Secretariat and the national and international experts working within the EaP GREEN project.

REC Caucasus Director Ms. Nune Harutyunyan outlined that there was another important achievement reached within the project – national expertise was strengthened in terms of SEA implementation in Armenia. National experts were becoming capable to implement SEA for plans, new legislation and strategies subject to SEA in accordance with European standards.

International SEA Expert to UNECE, EaP Green Coordinator, Mr. Martin Smutny, on behalf of the Espoo Convention Secretariat, acknowledged the progress Armenia made towards the improved SEA and EIA national frameworks and legislation, which was drafted in line with the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA. In his opinion, one of the most important achievement was that there was already a core group of people who understood the principles of SEA and how it should be implemented. *“This is very important that by the contribution of the EaP GREEN project the initial capacity has been created in the country to further develop and apply SEA and EIA”* said Mr. Smutny. He also mentioned that there was still a lot to be done to operationalize the draft law into efficient practice.

Following the opening, Mr. Martin Smutny, UNECE, delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the activities delivered as part UNECE technical assistance on SEA within the EaP GREEN in Armenia. In addition to noting the importance increased national capacities on SEA/EIA principles, Mr. Smutny talked about the legislation, He mentioned that after the adoption of the EIA and Expertise law in 2014, a number of working meetings took place, and currently, in 2017, the team developed amendments to the legislation, as well as the new draft GoA Decision on SEA procedure. Then, the SEA pilot was implemented in 2015-2016 on the Solid Waste Management Strategy, which allowed to test the draft SEA provisions. Currently together with the Ministry, a team of international and national SEA experts and lawyers were finalizing the Guidelines on SEA for Armenia. All the activities were well coordinated by the RA Ministry of Nature Protection, Mr. Smutny thanked the Ministry for good co-operation and coordination of the projects.



Then Mr. Smutny talked about the capacity building activities conducted within the project, namely the workshops with national experts that took place in Armenia in 2016 and 2017, where practical aspects of SEA application were discussed. He also mentioned that the Capacity-building Strategy / Roadmap on SEA for Armenia was under preparation aiming to define the future priorities to be included in the next phase of the EaP GREEN project. A dedicated Brochure on SEA would be also prepared in Armenia which would be important from the point of view of raising awareness among the wider public.

Next, [Mr. Gor Movsisyan](#) – a UNECE legal expert – delivered this presentation outlining the process of developing the draft national legislative framework for SEA in Armenia. He talked about the development process, the result and the way forward to finalize and adopt the national legislative framework for SEA.

[Ms. Nune Harutyunyan](#), REC Caucasus Regional Director, and [Ms. Sahakyan Dshkhuhi](#), national consultant to UNECE, delivered a presentation on Capacity Building Strategy on SEA and EIA covering the main directions and suggestions to improve local capacities of relevant stakeholders and agencies supporting activities and strategies which would be helpful for effective SEA implementation in Armenia. Relevant questionnaires were provided to stakeholders to collect their feedback in terms of further needs related to improved understanding and application of SEA. In line with the UNECE expert advice, they introduced three main aspects of the capacity building strategy, which covered the system capacity improvement, institutional capacities and human capacities.

After the break, [Ms. Azganush Drnoyan](#), Ministry of Nature Protection, delivered her presentation regarding the progress that had been made with the development of the SEA and EIA system in Armenia since 2013. The presentation covered the following topics:

- The adoption of the new law on “Environmental Impact Assessment and Expertise”.
- The implementation phases of SEA as per the Law.
- Legislative amendments that had been drafted to the new Law
- Procedure for the implementation of the SEA that was developed

- Project outcomes and achievements.

The presentation was followed by a discussion and stakeholder suggestions about the further development and application of SEA and EIA in Armenia.

Ms. Nune Bakunts, Deputy Director-General, National Center of Disease Control and Prevention mentioned it would be very useful to have a SEA guidance and suggested that it would be more reasonable also to conduct a professional training on SEA for health authorities so that they could understand the process and stages of SEA, and when and how they could be involved. Ms. Bakunts explained that there are certain information databases on health issues, however the state bodies are not aware of how these can be used for assessments. In her opinion, one issue that Armenia might face would be less about the absence of database, but more about the absence of methodologies for assessment. For each impact assessment it would be necessary to have a relevant method to assess health risks and health effects. More information would be needed about the methodologies and tools of health risk / impact assessment in connection to SEA and EIA.

Ms. Dshkhuhi noted that the existing databases were good yet lacking some information on health risks and negative impact on health. She agreed that there was a need for certain and specific methodologies or a minimal check-list of available health risks which should be usually studied and kept in mind while assessing the state of health, including the list of information sources, with references and reports. Also, this information and data were not freely accessible for the public, and for sure, certain research should be conducted and this data should be made available and usable for professionals.

Mr. Martin Smutny reflected to the latter discussion, he mentioned that for Armenia and other countries it could be recommended to include health assessment methodologies for SEA and EIA in the list of priorities for further development.

Ms. Azganush Drnoyan, Ministry of Nature Protection, clarified that health and environmental programs were not subject to the SEA. This was one of the changes in the law that was made in accordance with the Convention and as advised by the international experts. There was a special SEA procedure that could guide the state governing body step by step on how to implement SEA (Government Decision), as well as a dedicated guideline, which was in the development stage.

Mr. Smutny expressed hope that the SEA Recommendations would be a practical guidance document that would indeed help various stakeholders in practicing SEA.

After that, Ms. Hripsime Babayan, Chief Specialist of Local Government Division, suggested to conduct SEA awareness training in the regions as well (rather than only at the national level).

Ms. Maia Gachechiladze-Bozhesku, international SEA consultant to UNECE, delivered her presentation on the main elements of a well SEA and EIA system. She elaborated on the key pillars of effective EIA and SEA systems based on the best international practice. This covered:

- Policy, legal and procedural framework

- Institutional capacity
- Human capacity
- Quality control and feedback
- Historical context, mind-state of the society and political will
- Numerous case examples

The presentation was followed by a session of questions and answers, as well as a discussion and suggestions related to the topic. For instance, the questions related to the cons and pros of accreditation / certification of environmental assessment experts in Armenia, possible introduction of SEA courses in universities for students or in qualification-raising institutions for state officials, accreditation of SEA and EIA training course, and so forth.

In conclusion, [Ms. Eleanora Grigoryan, the Adviser to the Minister, Espoo Convention Focal Point, Ministry of Nature Protection](#) recommended to organize an international training for sector ministry officials in a country with a well-developed SEA system.

3.2 Summary of the second part of the event (26 December 2017)

Around 30 participants representing different organizations and projects, as well as representing different department of the ministry were present at the workshop, which is regularly organized by the Ministry at the end of the year to present outcomes of international projects implemented in Armenia. The list of participants is enclosed to the report in Annex 1.

During the workshop, the results of the SEA pilot and the legislative amendments, as well as the final SEA report on the Solid Waste Management Roadmap were presented and discussed. The Ministry was informed about the possibility for further capacity-building activities which would help to ease the process of SEA implementation in Armenia, as well as would help to improve knowledge, professional skills and awareness on SEA tools and methodologies, disseminate the best practices, improve data and information gathering, etc.

During the workshop Ms. Harutyunyan and Ms. Dshkhuhi presented the results of the EaP GREEN project and the main approaches / strategies and suggestive actions on SEA capacity-building for the future. The participants discussed some of the actions suggested for capacity building, including the elaboration of sectoral guidelines for line Ministries involved in SEA, capacity-building on SEA methodology, seminars on the best SEA practice and practice, legislative assistance, etc.

4. Conclusions and the way forward

A set of proposal and recommendations were made by the participants of both parts of the event. These were supplemented by suggestions of actions to be included in a draft capacity-building strategy that was drafted under the framework of the project to ensure sustainability and continuity of efforts targeting the improved SEA practice in Armenia, in line with the requirements of the Protocol on SEA.

The proposed actions are clustered in three streams: legislative, institutional capacity and human capacity development, and are summarized in turn below.

Legislative

- Assist in improving the SEA and EIA legislation,
- Develop a more precise regulation of the concept of a “final decision” in the context of EIA of a proposed activity,
- Detail the regulations on the post-project monitoring of the proposed activities subject to EIA and on monitoring as part of the SEA of fundamental documents,
- Detail the regulations on the principles of public notifications and of submission of remarks by the public predominantly based on the respective provisions of the Aarhus Convention.
- Elaborate guidance documents on specific topics (e.g. impact assessment methods and tools, quality control, how to account for climate change during EIA implementation, etc.) or procedures of secondary legislation on SEA/EIA (screening, public participation, etc.).

Institutional

- In the light of an increased number of SEA and EIA cases continue raising the capacity of the Ministry of Nature Protection, Ministry of Territorial development, Economic Development and Investments and the Ministry of Health regarding their expected role in SEA and EIA procedures;
- Take into consideration the costs related to the additional steps in SEA/EIA procedures (screening, scoping, potential transboundary consultations, more extensive public consultations) as stipulated by the Law, consequently, such costs should be budgeted in advance together with the costs related to the expertise costs for EIA/ SEA (especially relevant for the planning agencies);
- Ensure a strong system of quality control and commitment to quality assurance among SEA practitioners
- Create an information sharing system (e.g. SEA/EIA database)
- Establish and promote professional networking at the national level.

Human capacity

- Ensure and help consultancy companies and practitioners to carry out an increased number of SEAs and EIAs;
- Organize training and awareness-raising activities for the following groups. .
 - Environmental and health authorities
 - Planning agencies and project developers
 - Decision Makers:
 - Environmental experts and practitioners
 - NGOs and society

- As part of the further actions with the second phase of the EaP GREEN, conduct a pilot SEA at the national level and cooperate with Georgia with regards to SEA capacity building
- Preparation of awareness-raising materials (for example, an EIA information leaflet on public participation)
- Promote the practical use of the SEA and EIA (i.e. implement pilot SEAs and EIAs)
- Organize an international training for sector ministry officials in a country where the basis of the SEA is well implemented (also, some experience sharing with regional and / or EIA countries (regional and / or EU Member States))
- Implementation of public awareness and educational activities aimed at covering and disseminating the provisions of the SEA protocol and RA legislation related to EIA/SEA for government, local self-government bodies, professional bodies and agencies.

5. Annexes

5.1 Annex 1: List of participants – 22 and 26 December 2017

“TOWARDS A FULLY-FLEDGED SEA AND EIA SYSTEM IN ARMENIA”

Final dissemination event on the SEA and EIA component within the EaP GREEN

Start Day: December 22, 2017

Participants: 20, Female participants: 12

Bass Boutique Hotel, Yerevan, Armenia

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Presentation of main results on SEA and EIA component within the EaP GREEN

Start Day: December 26, 2017

Participants: 31, Female participants: 13

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5.2 Annex 2: Agenda

‘Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Armenia’

Final dissemination event on SEA and EIA component within the EaP GREEN (Part I)

22 December 2017
Bass Boutique Hotel, Aygedzor Street 3/1
Yerevan, Armenia

The "Greening Economies in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) project assists six countries of the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership including Armenia in progressing faster towards a green economy framework.² Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (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 supporting Armenia in developing the national SEA and EIA system. The objective of the final event is 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 event is organized by the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) within the framework of the EaP GREEN. The logistical support is provided by the REC Caucasus Armenia Branch Office.

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

Agenda

09.00 – 09.30	Registration of participants and welcome coffee
09.30 – 09.45	Opening the meeting and welcome of the participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mr. Khachik Hakobyan, Deputy Minister of Nature Protection, EaP Green Focal Point</i> • <i>Representative of EU Delegation to Armenia (tbc)</i> • <i>Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i>

² 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/>.

09.45 – 10.30	<p>Overview of the UNECE technical assistance within EaP GREEN in Armenia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction by Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i> • <i>Developing legislative framework – Presentation by Mr. Gor Movsisyan, international legal expert to UNECE</i> • <i>Capacity building on SEA application – Presentation by Ms. Nune Harutyunyan, REC Caucasus Regional Director</i> • <i>Questions and answers</i>
10.30 – 11.00	<p>The progress we have made – an overview of the development of SEA and EIA system in Armenia since 2013, major results and achievement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presentation by Mrs. Azganush Drnoyan, Ministry of Nature Protection</i> • <i>Questions and answers</i>
11.00 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.00	<p>Main elements of a well-developed SEA and EIA system – what is important for efficient practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Presentation by Ms. Maia Gachechiladze-Bozhesku, consultant to UNECE</i> • <i>Questions and answers</i>
12.00 – 12.45	<p>What needs to be further enhanced – remaining challenges for establishing a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system and way forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Introduction by Ms. Nune Harutyunyan, REC Caucasus Director</i> • <i>Group work – identification of priorities and needs to further develop national SEA and EIA system</i> • <i>Presentation of results</i>
12.45 – 13.00	<p>Closing remarks – way forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Elyanora Grigoryan, Adviser to the Minister, Espoo Convention Focal Point, Ministry of Nature Protection</i> • <i>Mr. Martin Smutny, EaP GREEN coordinator, consultant to UNECE</i>
13.00	Lunch

‘Towards a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system in Armenia’
Final event on SEA and EIA component within the EaP GREEN
 (Part 2)
 26 December 2017
 “Nor Dzoraberd” Complex, Yerevan

The "Greening Economies in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood" (EaP GREEN) project assists six countries of the European Union Eastern Neighbourhood Partnership including Armenia in progressing faster towards a green economy framework.³ Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (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 supporting Armenia in developing the national SEA and EIA system. The objective of the final event is 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 event is organized by the Ministry of Nature Protection of Armenia in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) within the framework of the EaP GREEN. REC Caucasus Armenia National office is responsible partner implementing current project in Armenia.

The workshop aimed at presenting the main outcomes and achievement of the Project to the Minister of Nature Protection and relevant stakeholders.

Agenda

09.30 – 10.00	Registration of participants
10.00 – 10.15	Opening the meeting and welcome of the participants <i>Mr. Artsvik Minasyan, Minister of Nature Protection</i>
10.15 – 10.45	Overview of the UNECE technical assistance within EaP GREEN in Armenia <i>Capacity building on SEA application – Presentation by Ms. Nune Harutyunyan, REC Caucasus Regional Director</i> <i>Questions and answers</i>
10.45 – 11.15	The progress we have made – an overview of the development of SEA and EIA system in Armenia since 2013, major results and achievement <i>Mrs. Azganush Drnoyan, Ministry of Nature Protection</i>

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	<i>Questions and answers</i>
11.15 – 11.30	Coffee break
11.30 – 12.15	<p>What needs to be further enhanced – remaining challenges for establishing a fully-fledged SEA and EIA system and way forward</p> <p><i>Ms. Nune Harutyunyan, REC Caucasus Director</i></p> <p><i>Questions and answers</i></p>
12.15 – 12.45	<p>Closing remarks - way forward</p> <p><i>Mr. Khachik Hakobyan, Deputy Minister of Nature Protection, EaP Green Focal Point</i></p>
13.00	Lunch