

# **Lessons learned from the development of SEA and EIA systems in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia**

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The presentation focuses on outcomes of capacity building and technical assistance that the UNECE secretariat to the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA has facilitated in 2013 – 2017 in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine to promote the use of SEA and EIA as essential planning tools for an environmentally sustainable economic development. The activities have been financed through the European Union’s Greening Economies in the Eastern Neighbourhood (EaP GREEN) programme.<sup>1</sup>

The activities have covered three priority areas:

- (i) Development of the national regulatory and legislative framework for SEA and EIA, including revisions of existing legislation, drafting new laws, and organizing events to promote updated legislative frameworks;
- (ii) Capacity building on SEA/EIA procedures, including several SEA pilots; “training of trainers” workshops on SEA/EIA both at the national and sub-regional levels; and development of information materials;
- (iii) Strengthening of administrative capacities of the countries for SEA and EIA through awareness raising events and materials.

The presentation also covers UNECE’s assistance on EIA and SEA in Central Asia funded by the European Union and Switzerland, including legislative advice to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and the update and further development of guidance for the application of transboundary EIA in the Central Asian countries.

The assistance has resulted in enhanced capacities of the countries’ relevant governmental agencies to coordinate SEA procedures and to perform the quality control of the SEA documentation, and in improved understanding of the role of SEA and its benefits among planning agencies and practitioners. Examples of the main achievements include: the adoption of new legal

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed information on the EaP GREEN can be found at <https://www.unece.org/environmental-policy/greening-the-economy-in-the-pan-european-region/eap-green.html>

frameworks for SEA and EIA in Georgia and in the Republic of Moldova, and for EIA in Ukraine, and the initiation of SEA practice by almost all the countries.

The experience from the EaP GREEN funded assistance demonstrates that international legal instruments such as the Espoo Convention and its Protocol on SEA, and the EU SEA and EIA Directives provide legal obligations and useful benchmarks for preparing the national legislative framework on SEA and EIA. Ratification of the Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA play a significant role in the development SEA and EIA (not only transboundary) systems at the national level. Similarly, requirements related to a potential future EU accession also speed up legislative development.

It is obvious, however, that drafting compliant legislation alone is not sufficient for the establishment of good SEA and EIA practice. Therefore, it is also essential for a country to enhance the capacities of the competent authorities for SEA/EIA to coordinate the procedures and to carry out quality control, and to establish sufficient capacities of SEA/EIA practitioners to conduct SEA and EIA processes including relevant analyses. The outcomes of UNECE's assistance demonstrated that pilot application of SEA and EIA was the most efficient way to build capacity as it provided a hands-on opportunity for stakeholders to follow a full SEA/EIA procedure. Optimally, legislative development and capacity building activities should be implemented simultaneously, so that both processes can mutually reinforce each other.

**Keywords:** UNECE, Espoo Convention, Protocol on SEA, EaP GREEN, capacity building