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Guidelines on Assessment of the Quality Control of Strategic Environmental Assessment



Action implemented by:



**Guidelines
on Assessment of the Quality Control
of Strategic Environmental Assessment**

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List of abbreviations

CE	Commission of Experts
EIA	environmental impact assessment
GD	Governmental Decision
MARDE	Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment
OG	Official Gazette
PP	plans and programmes
SEA	strategic environmental assessment
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

GENERAL PROVISIONS

Within the framework of the European Union funded EU4Environment Programme (2019–2024), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) assisted the Eastern Partnership countries, including the Republic of Moldova (hereinafter Moldova), in finalizing legal reforms and comprehensive capacity-building for the application of a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) and environmental impact assessment (EIA) in a transboundary context.

One of the areas requiring further external assistance has been identified by the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Moldova as the need to prepare specific guidance on the quality control of SEA (hereinafter “*Guidelines*”).



Purpose of this document

The *Guidelines* have been prepared in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, reorganized in August 2021 according to Governmental Decision 145 of 25 August 2021, and other national authorities in order to support the effective application of the existing SEA-related legal framework (national and international). The *Guidelines* should help the SEA competent authorities to evaluate the quality of the SEA procedure (including the SEA report), as well as complementing existing guidance documents (such as the *Guideline for Conducting the Strategic Environmental Assessment*, published as Order No. 219 of 1 October 2018 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment (MARDE) and published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Moldova No. 384–395 art. 1493¹).

According to the new provisions and amendments of Law No. 11 of 2 March 2017 on SEA (amended by Law 226 of 30 September 2022, OG No. 326–333 art. 626 and entering into force from 21 October 2023), the SEA report will be subject to a quality control assessment by the Commission of Experts (CE) constituted according to art. 81 para. 1. By necessity, as provided by article 82 para. 4, the CE can be completed with representatives of the public authorities concerned, identified in accordance with article 5 paragraph 21, as well as with other independent experts.

Thus, the SEA report submitted by the initiator to the competent authority will be shared with the CE within five days for quality assessment to be carried out. The CE has approximately 45 days (15 days from the completion of public consultations according to para. 3) to examine the quality of the report and to submit in writing to the competent authority a detailed and reasoned opinion on the quality of the report.

If the quality of the report on the strategic environmental assessment is inadequate, the competent authority, within ten working days after receiving the opinion of the CE, draws up a conclusion on the quality of the report. Also, the inappropriate aspects of the report will be pointed out, with reference to the comments and proposals received from the interested public and the opinion of the CE. The recommended measures for finalizing the report will also be specified.

If the SEA report is returned for finalization according to para. 7, the deadline for repeated examination is 20 working days from the date of submission of the completed document by the initiator.

Structure of the *Guidelines* and how to use them

The quality of an SEA is understood for the purpose of the *Guidelines* as being in compliance with the criteria derived from (a) the formal provisions (stipulated by Law 11/2017 on SEA) and (b) the general objectives and principles of international good SEA practice. This is reflected in the structure of the *Guidelines*, which consist of two sets of criteria, concerning:

- Design of the SEA process and compliance with Law 11/2017 on SEA (Checklist 1)
- Quality review of the SEA report (Checklist 2).

Any SEA process can be evaluated against these criteria. Since there is no quantitative benchmark for “standard” SEA, the review must be conducted in a *qualitative* manner, relying on the verbal description of how certain aspects of quality (represented by quality criteria) have been met in a specific SEA case.

The SEA report is the primary source of information enabling the quality to be evaluated. However, relevant information can also be obtained from other sources (e.g. from the competent authority responsible for the given SEA, or stakeholders participating in the SEA process).

¹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=110732&lang=ro

Indeed, for full and correct answering some of the evaluation questions, it is important for the CE carrying out the quality control to be familiar with the way the evaluated SEA has proceeded and to take into consideration any feedback from the stakeholders.

The quality control should, at a minimum, establish whether the SEA was carried out in accordance with the legislation and can therefore constitute a safe basis for further administrative steps (namely, issuing the environmental permit, allowing the formal adoption/approval of the strategic document).

In practical terms, the quality control exercise can proceed as follows:

- **Checklist 1** concerning the SEA process and legal compliance can be used by the [staff of the competent authority](#) as a guiding tool on each SEA step throughout the whole process to ensure that all procedural steps were correctly executed, as well as in the final stage as a component of the overall quality control of the SEA evaluation.
- **Checklist 2** is used only when the SEA report is available; namely, [in the advanced phase of the SEA process](#), as an aid tool in the phase of formal quality control as per article 8 of Law 11/2017 on SEA). Upon receipt of the SEA report, the experts (e.g. members of the CE, as per Article 8 of Law 11/2017 on SEA) can use both checklists provided in the *Guidelines*, containing a set of evaluation questions for each of the quality aspects described in the sections below.

Examining the SEA report documentation in the light of the evaluation questions will help evaluators to form an opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the delivered SEA outputs and the quality of the underlying SEA process. The observations resulting from the evaluation can be summarized in a suitable comprehensible format (see an example of such an evaluation matrix under “Quality review of the SEA report” below) and can be used as a basis for preparing the formal reasoned opinion that will inform the decision of the competent authority on the quality of the SEA report.

Legal framework (Summary of key legal provisions, and references to relevant sources)

Institutional responsibilities

The competent authority responsible for SEA, both at national and local level are defined in Law 11/2017 on SEA, as well in the Guideline regarding the performance of the SEA procedure.

The Law foresees SEA Competent Authorities with distinctive areas of authority:

1. The central authority for environmental protection, the Ministry of Environment, serves as the SEA competent authority for national policy and planning documents, including sectoral and intersectoral ones, approved by the Government or Parliament.
2. The Environmental Agency serves as the SEA competent authority for local policy and planning documents, approved by the local public administration.

Articles 3² and 3³ of Law 11/2017 on SEA stipulate the above indicated division of responsibilities. The Ministry of Environment is also responsible for all cases of the transboundary SEA.

SEA QUALITY CONTROL CRITERIA AND THEIR APPLICATIONS

I. Design of the SEA process and compliance with the Law on SEA

Checklist 1 provides guidance for reviewing compliance of an SEA with the requirements stipulated by Law 11/2017 on SEA. Simple evaluation by “yes” and “no” is to be followed by comments or suggestions on possible improvements.

CHECKLIST 1

Compliance with the SEA procedural requirements

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments/ suggestions
Determination of need for an SEA (screening) Has the initiator established whether the strategic document under preparation requires an SEA?			
Does the strategic document meet criteria stipulated in article 3, para. 1, letters a, b of Law 11/2017 on SEA (i.e. no screening required)?			
Does the strategic document meet criteria stipulated in article 3, para. 2 or 3 of Law 11/2017 on SEA (i.e. screening required)?			
Has the initiator submitted the application for the preliminary assessment/scoping as per article 5?			
Does the required content of the application for the preliminary assessment/scoping contain the following information?			
a) Information about the initiator <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the name and address of the institution first name, last name, address and contact data of the authorized representative of the initiator 			

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments/ suggestions
b) Information on the strategic document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • title of the strategic document • justification for the need to draft the strategic document • main environment-protection-related aspects included in the draft strategic document • main directions and implementation deadline • framework is in place for the projects and activities listed in annexes 1 and 2 to Law No. 86/2014 on EIA, and those for which a permit is required • possible significant effects on the environment, including on the health of the population, as a result of the strategic document implementation • the strategic document drafting term and approval method • the transboundary implications of the strategic document implementation • the concept of the strategic document according to article 31 para. 1 from Law 11/2017 on SEA 			
c) Information on the affected territory <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establishing the affected territory • main characteristics of environmental problems on the affected territory • extent and nature of possible effects of the strategic document on the elements of the Emerald Network as are provided in Law No. 94/2007 on the ecological network. 			
Scoping Has the competent authority, together with the initiator, established a list of interested public authorities (including the authorized healthcare body, as well as the local executive bodies) of the territorial units where the strategic document is to be implemented)?			
Has the information about the preliminary assessment/ scoping application been duly published so that the interested public had ten days to submit their comments?			
Has the competent authority carried out consultations with interested public authorities on the required scope of the SEA and recorded minutes containing the comments from participating stakeholders?			
Has the scope of the SEA been defined through issuing a legal opinion on the preliminary assessment by the competent authority?			
Does the SEA report contain the required information as per appendix 2 of Law 11/2017 on SEA? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) a summary of the content, main objectives of the plan or programme, and connections with other plans or programmes b) relevant aspects of the current state of the environment, including human health and its likely evolution without the plan or programme implementation c) environmental characteristics of areas that may be significantly affected, including human health, as a result of the plan or programme implementation d) any current environmental problems that are relevant to the plan or programme, including those relevant for any area of particular importance for the environment e) objectives for the protection of the environment, including of human health, established at international, national and other levels, which are important for the plan or programme, and how these objectives and any environmental considerations are taken into account during drafting of the plan or programme 			

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments/ suggestions
<p>f) possible significant effects on the environment, including on biodiversity, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, cultural heritage and landscapes. These must include any secondary, cumulative, medium-term or long-term, permanent or temporary, positive or negative effect</p> <p>g) actions planned for preventing, reducing, and, to the extent possible, balancing any significant adverse effects on the environment, including on human health, through the plan or programme implementation</p> <p>h) a description of the reasons for selecting the alternative options considered within the SEA, and of the manner in which the assessment has been performed, including any difficulty related to the lack of necessary methods or knowledge, insufficiency of information or technical means required for the assessment; and if an alternative has been eliminated, is the reason for doing so explained?</p> <p>i) a description of actions planned for monitoring the significant effects on the environment, including on human health, as a result of the plan or programme implementation (monitoring programme). Are the indicators for monitoring clearly defined? And are they based upon the original baseline information and on the objectives of the plans and programmes (PP) and the SEA?</p> <p>j) possible effects on the environment in a transboundary context, including those related to human health</p> <p>k) a short summary of the SEA report, presented in a form accessible to and appropriate for the public.</p>			
<p>Does the SEA report content comply with the scope defined in the legal opinion on the preliminary assessment in terms of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant environmental and health problems to be addressed • significant effects of the strategic document on elements of the ecological network or other protected areas that are of local, national or international significance • transboundary environmental impacts from the implementation of the strategic document • environmental goals or objectives, including those related to an environment favourable to human life and health, which are relevant to the strategic document and set at the international, national or local levels. 			
<p>Has the SEA report been duly published so that the interested public can submit their comments?</p>			
<p>Did the initiator and competent authority prepare a statement of consultations, summarizing comments and suggestions received and indicating how comments and suggestions expressed had been taken into account in the strategic document and the SEA report?</p>			
<p>Was the SEA conclusion regarding the draft strategic document published and taken into account before the formal approval and adoption of the strategic document?</p>			
<p>After approval of the strategic document, has the initiator posted the environmental permit on its official webpage, as well as the following?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the strategic document in the approved form b) information on how the environmental issues have been integrated into the strategic document, the effects of the strategic document on the environment c) information on the consultation of the public and central and local public authorities, results of consultations in a transboundary context. 			

II. Quality review of the SEA report

Following the basic compliance test using the binary criteria set out above, a thorough review of the quality of the SEA can be carried out with the use of the criteria presented in checklist 2 below.

Comparing the draft SEA report documentation with the evaluation questions from checklist 2 will help evaluators to form an opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the delivered SEA outputs and indeed about the quality of the underlying SEA process. The observations resulting from the evaluation can be summarized in a suitable comprehensible format (see the following example of an evaluation matrix).

SEA quality control evaluation matrix

Quality aspect	Overall scoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completely covered/satisfactory • Partially covered/acceptable • Completely missing/unacceptable • Cannot be evaluated due to lack of information/need for clarification • Not relevant (a quality aspect is not relevant for the case) 	Comments (e.g. indication of a pass/fail score for a given quality aspect, indication of needs for further improvement)
1. Scope of assessment of the SEA report		
2. Baseline analysis		
3. Assessment of possible significant effects on the environment (i.e. impact evaluation)		
4. Mitigation measures		
5. Monitoring		
6. SEA report		
7. Consultations and stakeholder participation		
Final verdict		

CHECKLIST 2

Detailed quality control guiding questions

#	Criteria	Overall scoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completely covered/satisfactory • Partially covered/acceptable • Completely missing/unacceptable • Cannot be evaluated due to lack of information/need for clarification • Not relevant (a quality aspect is not relevant for the case) 	Comments (e.g. indication of a pass/fail score for a given quality aspect, indication of needs for further improvement)
1	Scope of assessment of the SEA report		
1.1.	Were the purpose and objectives of the plan assessed clearly described?		
1.2.	Were the key environmental/sustainable development issues to be addressed by the SEA clearly defined?		
1.3.	Were the reasons for eliminating certain issues from the SEA (if this was the case) given and explained?		
1.4.	Were relevant objectives for the key issues identified and described?		
1.5.	Were the main problems for each key environmental issue identified and described?		
1.6.	Was the territorial scope of the SEA (i.e. area to be likely affected by the plan) defined?		
1.7.	Were the linkages between the plan under assessment and other existing plans (or major projects) identified and described?		
2	Baseline analysis		
2.1.	Was the existing state of the environment described?		
2.2.	Were the past trends for the key environmental issues analysed?		
2.3.	If so, were the main drivers (i.e. factors influencing trends) identified?		

#	Criteria	Overall scoring	Comments
2.4.	Was the future evolution of the key environmental issues without the plan's implementation analysed?		
2.5.	Was the area wider than the administrative/ physical boundaries of the plan considered in analyses?		
2.6.	Were the main environmental concerns, with their locations, clearly stated?		
2.7.	If the answer to 2.6 is yes, was it made clear whether they can be affected by the PP?		
2.8.	Were possible limitations regarding the data and information availability (including their availability in the national, district/ municipal authorities) and related potential uncertainties in analyses described?		
3	Assessment of possible significant effects on the environment (i.e. impact evaluation)		
3.1.	Were likely conflicts and synergies between environmental objectives for the key issues and the plan's objectives identified and described?		
3.2.	Were all alternatives presented by the PP assessed?		
3.3.	Was the full range of effects to all key environmental issues evaluated?		
3.4.	Were the effects characterized (i.e. their nature, significance, probability, scope and extent, frequency and duration, reversibility)?		
3.5.	Were all types of effects considered (i.e. direct and any indirect, secondary, positive and negative, cumulative, synergistic, short-, medium- and long-term, permanent and temporary)?		
3.6.	Were impacts on any of environmental/ sustainable issues excluded from the evaluation? If so, were the reasons provided?		

#	Criteria	Overall scoring	Comments
3.7.	Were impacts quantified where possible?		
3.8.	Was impact evaluation substantiated by calculations, examples, references to literature, etc.?		
3.9.	Were the methods used to evaluate the impacts described?		
3.10.	Were potential uncertainties in impact evaluation described?		
4	Mitigation measures		
4.1.	Were measures to prevent, reduce and/or offset any significant adverse effects suggested by SEA for all main impacts identified?		
4.2.	Are mitigation measures clearly linked to identified negative impacts (i.e. is it clear which negative effects of the PP will be mitigated by a given measure?)?		
4.3.	Was responsibility for implementation of mitigation measures assigned?		
5	Monitoring		
5.1.	Are the indicators for monitoring clearly defined, and are they based upon the baseline information, indicators and the objectives of the plan and/or the SEA?		
5.2.	Where monitoring may reveal significant adverse effects, does the SEA clearly define commitments for actions to be made in response to these effects?		
6	SEA report		
6.1.	Does the SEA report use simple, clear language and avoid or explain technical terms?		
6.2.	Does the SEA report use maps and other illustrations where appropriate?		

#	Criteria	Overall scoring	Comments
6.3.	Does the SEA report describe the overall approach to the assessment?		
6.4.	Were the conclusions and recommendations given by SEA made explicit?		
6.5.	Does the SEA report clearly state which recommendations and suggestions given by SEA have been integrated into the plan (i.e. if there were any changes of the plan resulting from the SEA)?		
6.6.	Does the SEA report explain who was consulted, what methods of consultation were used, and how the conclusions from consultations have been considered in SEA and/or the PP assessed?		
6.7.	Does the SEA report identify sources of information, including expert judgment and matters of opinion?		
6.8.	Does the SEA report describe technical, procedural, and other difficulties?		
7	Consultations and stakeholder participation		
7.1.	Were the stakeholders to be involved in the SEA identified at the beginning of the SEA process?		
7.2.	Was the consultation and participation plan developed?		
7.3.	Were the consultations and stakeholder participation within the SEA carried out jointly with the PP preparation process?		
7.4.	Were stakeholders consulted in ways and at times that give them an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinions on the draft PP and SEA report?		

The evaluation/review guiding questions for the seven reviewed components are discussed in detail in the following section.

1. Scope of assessment

1.1. Were the purpose and objectives of the plan assessed clearly described?

Rationale: The SEA should be focused on the specific plans and programmes (PP) (a subject of the assessment). The purpose and objectives of the PP provide guidance for identifying the key issues likely to be affected by the PP and which should be addressed by the SEA.

1.2. Were the key environmental/sustainable development issues to be addressed by the SEA clearly defined?

Rationale: There is a broad variety of plans and programmes, which might have very different environmental, including health, and sustainable development consequences (e.g. a transport plan might cause different environmental effects – effect on biodiversity, habitat fragmentation, noise, etc., whereas for an agricultural programme, water pollution and soil degradation will be more relevant). The appropriate scope of the SEA is one of the preconditions for efficient assessment – proper selection of the issues to be addressed helps to focus expert capacities, time and budget available on aspects that are important for future development of the environment and related socioeconomic issues in the area or sector. When specifying the key issues, the SEA should reflect the main characteristic of the territory covered by the PP (state of the environment, existing social problems, etc.) and the nature and expected content of the PP. The list of the key issues should be optimally discussed with planners as well as other stakeholders.



1.3. Were the reasons for eliminating certain issues from the SEA (if this was the case) given and explained?

Rationale: Each SEA is specific – efficient assessment deals with the most relevant environmental, including health, or sustainable development issues. However, if certain issues are excluded from the assessment (e.g. if it was agreed during the scoping that the noise and air quality issues are not relevant for the forestry-related plan), the explanation should be provided. The final set of issues to be addressed should be optimally agreed among the key stakeholders.

1.4. Were relevant objectives for the key issues identified and described?

Rationale: The selection of the key environmental, including health, or sustainable development issues needs to be substantiated by relevant objectives taken from existing formal documents (e.g. legal acts, approved national or regional policies, international treaties) to document that the list of key issues reflects relevant environmental policy objectives and commitments.

1.5. Were the main problems for each key environmental issue identified and described?

Rationale: Identifying already existing environmental problems is an important component of the baseline analysis that will serve as a measure against which the potential effects of the given plan or programme will be evaluated at the later stage of the SEA.

1.6. Was the territorial scope of the SEA (i.e. area to be likely affected by the plan) defined?

Rationale: Usually, the PP has clearly defined territory to be covered which is derived from administrative borders

- it can be a nationwide policy document (i.e. covering the entire area of the country),
- it can be a municipal spatial plan, or programme for a specific territory (e.g. for forest areas).

However, likely environmental effects of the PP might vary significantly – from only local impacts (e.g. within the urban area of a town) to the effects going beyond administrative borders of the district or even country (e.g. water and air pollution). Thus, considering the content of the PP and environmental characteristics of the area, the SEA, in its early stages, should define the territory to be addressed – it can be first done separately for each key issue as a base for description of the overall territorial scope of the assessment. The scoping conclusion must therefore clearly indicate what is the territorial scope of the SEA, whether it aligns with the administrative borders and with the area of implementation of the PP.

1.7. Were the linkages between the plan under assessment and other existing plans (or major projects) identified and described?

Rationale: The PP, which is a subject of the SEA, is usually part of the overall planning system for a given sector or territory. It means it is (or should be) linked to other PPs, which can be:

- **superior** (e.g. national policy for the sectoral programme),
- **at the same level** (e.g. other sectoral PPs),
- **or subordinate** (e.g. municipal PPs for a national sectoral programme).

Analysis of linkages between the assessed PP and other PPs should identify likely synergies, conflicts, inconsistencies, and potential other PPs' impacts, which should be reflected in the SEA. It also helps to identify relevant environmental/sustainable development objectives to be addressed in the SEA.

2. Baseline analysis

2.1. Was the existing state of the environment described?

Rationale: The SEA should identify the key environmental issues and problems, which need to be addressed in the assessment. Describing the existing state of the environment in the area to be likely affected by the PP provides a necessary basis against which the plan's potential effects will be evaluated.

2.2. Were the past trends for the key environmental issues analysed?

Rationale: The SEA should evaluate PP's impacts i.e. how PP can affect future development. Analysis of the past trends is an essential task enabling us to estimate future development of the environment. There is no general rule for how far in the past the analysis should go, as that will always depend on the parameters used, the occurrence of previous historical turning points in a given trend, and the like. Availability of data can be another limiting factor. Nevertheless, wherever feasible, the baseline analysis should prefer trends to merely snapshot information when describing the existing state of the environment.

2.3. If so, were the main drivers (i.e. factors influencing trends) identified?

Rationale: Quite often, development in many areas is influenced by a number of factors. For example, the air quality can be affected by transport, industrial development, or enforcement of the regulatory framework, as well as being dependent on the local climate conditions, the character of landscape, etc. Identification of the main drivers allows more precise estimation of future development – i.e. based on expected changes of the drivers (predictions of the future transport intensity, industrial development, expected effects from adopting new regulations) the future evolution of the air quality trend can be better estimated.

2.4. Was the future evolution of the key environmental issues without the plan's implementation analysed?

Rationale: The SEA should evaluate how PP implementation can affect future development. However, this cannot be done without describing the likely future evolution of the environment if the proposed PP is not implemented – this is often called “business as usual” or “zero scenario”. Based on previous analysis (existing state of environment, analysis of past trends, identification of main drivers), the SEA should estimate and describe likely future development for the key environmental/sustainable development issues, which were identified in scoping. The potential effects of the PP on the environment are then identified through evaluation of differences between the two alternative scenarios, i.e. the business as usual (when the proposed PP is not implemented) versus the scenario when the proposed PP is implemented. Box 1 provides guiding questions, which should be addressed within baseline analysis.²

2.5. Was the area wider than the administrative/physical boundaries of the plan considered in analyses?

Rationale: PPs have usually clearly defined area, which is covered – it can be the entire country, district, or municipality. However, PP's effects might go beyond its boundaries – e.g. water quality in one district can be influenced by industrial or agriculture development in another district, located upstream. These impacts need also to be considered in the SEA, and thus baselines analyses shouldn't be principally limited by administrative and physical boundaries of the PP.

2 Adapted from P. Wathern P. (1988): ed. “Introductory Guideline on EIA in Wathern P(ed)”. *Environmental Impact Assessment: theory and practice* (Practice, pp. 1 – 28). (Routledge, London., 1988).

BOX 1**Questions to be addressed within baseline analysis**

- How good or bad is the current situation? Do trends show that it is getting better or worse?
- Which main driving forces influence trends? Can these be affected by the PP (if so, how)?
- How far is the current situation from any established thresholds or targets?
- Are particularly sensitive or important elements of the receiving environment affected, e.g. vulnerable social groups, non-renewable resources, endangered species, rare habitats, natural protected areas?
- Are the problems reversible or irreversible, permanent or temporary?
- How difficult would it be to offset or remedy any damage?
- Have there been significant cumulative or synergistic effects over time? Are there expected to be such effects in the future?

2.6. Were the main environmental concerns, with their locations, clearly stated?

Rationale: Baseline analysis should result in identification of the key environmental/sustainable development problems in the concerned area to be addressed in the SEA. If possible, these problems should be localized – some might be relevant for the entire region, while others can be specific only for small territory.

2.7. If so, was it made clear whether they can be affected by the PP?

Rationale: Usually, not all existing environmental/sustainable development problems identified through baseline analysis can be affected by the PP – e.g. the problem with municipal waste management cannot be influenced by the transport infrastructure plan. The SEA should be primarily focused on those issues and problems which can be affected by the PP, and thus impacts can be effectively addressed in the SEA.

2.8. Were possible limitations regarding the data and information availability (including their availability in the national, district / municipal authorities) and related potential uncertainties in analyses described?

Rationale: In most cases, the SEA is not supposed to involve field research and collect new raw data. The baseline analysis should be based on data already available from existing monitoring systems and documents (other PPs in the same sector or covering the same territory, environmental yearbooks, previous assessments – both SEA and EIA, environmental action plans, scientific and research studies, etc.). Missing data and information needed must be sought after the SEA consultations and as far as possible supplied by planning or environmental agencies or by other stakeholders involved. Baseline information may be quantitative or qualitative, and it is often helpful to combine both types of information. Providing only qualitative information needs to be supported by reasoned evidence.

Missing data and information as well as existing uncertainties, need to be clearly documented as one of the results of the baseline analysis.

3. Impact evaluation

3.1. Were likely conflicts and synergies between environmental objectives for the key issues and the plan's objectives identified and described?

Rationale: The SEA should analyse relations (i.e. potential synergies and conflicts) between the proposed PP and the environmental objectives for the key issues defined in the scoping stage (i.e. selected relevant environmental policy objectives and commitments). This step should provide feedback to the planners and at minimum, ensure that the goals and objectives of the PP are not in conflict with the environmental policy objectives. Ideally, it should facilitate reflection of these environmental policy objectives in the PP so that its implementation will contribute wherever possible to meet the environmental objectives.

3.2. Were all alternatives presented by the PP assessed?

Rationale: There are various types of alternatives, which can be suggested by the PP – including alternative objectives and priorities, development scenarios, alternative measures. PP can propose different locations for a specific development proposal, or other ways of implementation can be elaborated. The SEA is supposed to evaluate and compare all the PP alternatives, which are proposed – only then the alternative(s) which is (are) optimal from the point of view of the environment and sustainable development can be identified and recommended for implementation.

If none of the alternatives suggested by the PP can be recommended by the SEA to be further elaborated or approved, the SEA may propose new option(s). However, in this case it is very important to discuss suggestions made by the SEA team with planners/planning agency; otherwise, there is a high probability that these suggestions will not be accepted.

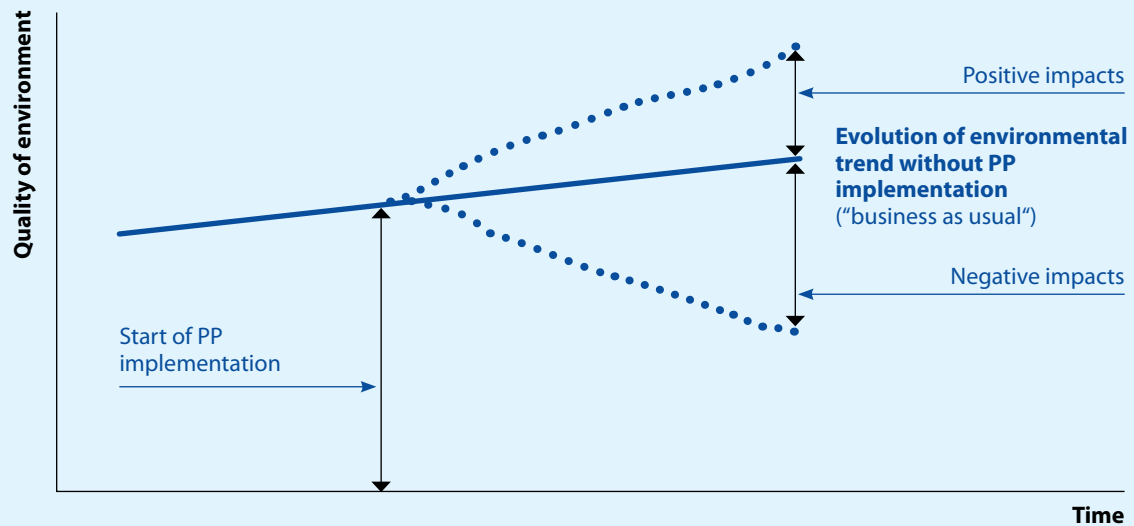
3.3. Was the full range of effects to all key environmental issues evaluated?

Rationale: The scope of assessment should be defined in the scoping stage of the SEA when key environmental/sustainable development issues are determined. The evaluation has to address PP's impacts on all these key issues i.e. the SEA should evaluate changes of the baseline trends (described in the baseline analysis), which are likely to be caused by the implementation of the PP. Evaluation has to describe these effects (i.e. likely changes of future development) in terms of their magnitude, their geographical scale, the time period over which they will occur, whether they are permanent or temporary, positive or negative, probable or improbable, frequent or rare, and whether or not there are secondary, cumulative and/or synergistic effects. Box 2 illustrates how PP impacts can be understood.³

3.4. Were the effects characterized (i.e. their nature, significance, probability, scope and extent, frequency and duration, reversibility)?

Rationale: The SEA must provide a clear description of the likely impacts allowing for adequate response in terms of prevention, minimization and mitigation measures. Both short-term (i.e. during the construction of envisaged projects) and long-term effects must be considered. If a specific area where the effects are likely to concentrate or a specific vulnerable group/population can be identified, it must be clearly acknowledged.

³ Adapted from P. Wathern P. (1988); ed. "An introductory Guide to EIA in Wathern P(ed)". *Environmental Impact Assessment: Theory and Practice*, (pp. 1 – 28). (Routledge, London., 1988).

BOX 2**Impacts of PP implementation**

3.5. Were all types of effects considered (i.e. direct and any indirect, secondary, positive and negative, cumulative, synergistic, short-, medium- and long-term, permanent and temporary)?

Rationale: The SEA should not focus only on direct effects but also on any significant secondary impacts likely to be caused by the PP implementation. Secondary impacts can be defined as “indirect or induced changes in the environment, population, economic growth and land-use and other environmental effects resulting from direct impacts of the plan”, e.g. increase in air polluting emissions triggered by the plan implementation can affect the water quality through atmospheric deposition and affect the aquatic ecosystems).

Compared to an EIA, an SEA has a higher potential to address cumulative impacts i.e. impacts that result from incremental changes caused by other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions together with the proposal. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.⁴ Typically if the proposed PP envisages the development of a number of projects (e.g. roads, industrial zones, windfarms), the potential for a cumulative effect must be evaluated.

Likely positive impacts should not be forgotten – their evaluation provides a base for suggesting measures to strengthen positive effects of the PP on the environment / sustainable development.

When impacts are identified, the SEA has to describe in detail the character of impacts i.e. their nature, significance, probability, scope and extent, frequency and duration, reversibility.

⁴ From B. Sadler and M. McCabe. *Environmental Impacts Assessment Training Resource Manual, 2nd ed.* (United Nations Environment Programme, 2002).

3.6. Were impacts on any of environmental/sustainable issues excluded from the evaluation? If so, were the reasons provided?

Rationale: The SEA should address likely impacts of the PP on all key environmental/sustainable development issues identified in the scoping stage. A list of issues differs case by case, however following issues should be considered:

- Environmental components such as climate, air, water, soil, biodiversity, ecosystems and landscape,
- Human population related issues e.g. human health, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, livelihood of local communities,
- Broader sustainable development concerns e.g. energy efficiency, use of renewable and non-renewable resources, adaptation to climate change, transport demands, accessibility, and mobility.

If impacts on certain issue(s) have not been evaluated (e.g. due to non-relevancy or non-significance), the SEA has to clearly explain this decision and substantiate the explanation with relevant data and information.

3.7. Were impacts quantified where possible?

Rationale: Even if called “strategic”, an SEA should quantify impacts if the character of the PP allows it. Often it might be the case of the spatial plans at the local level, which provide information specific enough (on the location or size of the proposal) for quantification of likely impacts, while assessment of more general strategic documents (e.g. national policies) has to usually remain only on a qualitative basis. However, qualitative does not mean ‘guessed’. Predictions need to be supported by evidence, such as references to any research, discussions or consultation which helped the SEA team to reach their conclusions.

3.8. Was impact evaluation substantiated by calculations, examples, references to literature, etc.?

Rationale: Impact evaluation as well as all suggestions made by the SEA have to be substantiated by appropriate data and information, supported by examples, references, illustrated by visual aids (maps, graphs) etc., which need to be described in the SEA report. Otherwise, the planning agency and other stakeholders might be reluctant to consider evaluation and suggestions provided by SEA since they might not understand on what basis these have been made.

3.9. Were the methods used to evaluate the impacts described?

Rationale: Methods, approaches, techniques, and tools used to evaluate the impacts have to be clearly explained in order to enable transparent consultation and verification of the SEA conclusions by other stakeholders.

3.10. Were potential uncertainties in impact evaluation described?

Rationale: In many cases, the evaluation (as well as other SEA analyses) is burdened with uncertainties resulting from missing data on the state of the environment, insufficient information on the development proposals and measures suggested by the PP, etc. The SEA team has to clearly describe existing uncertainties and justify assumptions that were considered when evaluating impacts (e.g. by estimating best/worst scenarios, examples of impacts from similar activities in other areas/countries, references to literature).

4. Mitigation measures

4.1. Were measures to prevent, reduce and/or offset any significant adverse effects suggested by the SEA for all main impacts identified?

Rationale: Based on impacts' evaluation, the SEA should suggest measures to prevent, mitigate or compensate likely significant adverse effects and enhance likely positive ones. For every single significant negative impact identified, the SEA must propose adequate mitigation. The form and character of measures proposed by the SEA depend on the type of impacts identified and the nature and character of the PP assessed.

Box 3 provides examples of mitigation measures that can be suggested by an SEA.

BOX 3

Examples of mitigation measures

- **Changes of the assessed PP, which can include:**
 - Modification of objectives and priorities to integrate relevant environmental and health issues in the strategy in order to shift the focus of the plan or programme more towards the sustainable development (e.g. the SEA can propose objective to support the public transport, if the plan only addresses transport infrastructure).
 - Modification of specific measure and development actions, proposed by the PP, in order to minimize or avoid specific negative impacts – it can include e.g. alternative development methods, changes of locations (e.g. new location or reducing the area), scale and sequencing/timing of proposed developments (e.g. SEA can propose re-routing of highway).
 - Modification of implementing scheme: the SEA can define limits for implementation of specific projects (e.g. "no-go areas"), criteria for selection of projects, and/or to provide guidance on the scope of EIAs for specific projects.
- **Suggestion for compensation (e.g. planting new forests, providing financial compensation to people, who will have to be resettled etc.)**
- **Changes in regulatory, legal and/or institutional framework**
- **Modification of other relevant PPs if some impacts cannot be mitigated though the plan or programme assessed.**
- **Stipulating conditions for potential follow-up procedures e.g. issues to be addressed in EIAs for specific development proposals suggested by the PP assessed, main priorities for environmental management plan, design guidance for specific projects, etc.**



4.2. Are mitigation measures clearly linked to identified negative impacts (i.e. is it clear which negative effects of the PP will be mitigated by a given measure?)?

Rationale: The SEA must clearly present how individual risks and potential negative effects on the environment will be addressed and to demonstrate that no significant adverse effect will be left unmitigated. This must also ensure a transparent discussion of the effectiveness of proposed mitigation during the consultations with stakeholders. If for some reason there is no feasible mitigation available for some potential negative effect, this must be explicitly acknowledged and presented among the main conclusions of the SEA.

4.3. Was responsibility for implementation of mitigation measures assigned?

Rationale: The SEA team should consult suggested mitigation measures with the planning agency as well as with other relevant stakeholders (e.g. environmental authorities) in order to achieve an agreement on the implementation of mitigation measures. Following the conclusions from consultations, the SEA report or the PP itself should assign responsibility for implementing the mitigation measures proposed.

5. Monitoring

5.1. Are the indicators for monitoring clearly defined, and are they based upon the baseline information, indicators, and the objectives of the plan and/or the SEA?

Rationale: SEA should suggest monitoring effects of the PP on environmental, including health, and sustainable development issues during PP implementation phase. Indicators and criteria to be used for monitoring should reflect the key issues addressed in SEA – if assessment concludes that e.g. air quality might be significantly affected by the PP implementation, relevant indicator(s) have to be proposed. When suggesting a monitoring system for a specific PP, environmental authorities should be consulted since monitoring should be ideally based mainly on already existing indicators and systems, and new indicators and criteria should be introduced only exceptionally.

5.2. Where monitoring may reveal significant adverse effects, does the SEA clearly define commitments for actions to be made in response to these effects?

Rationale: Monitoring of environmental effects (and effects to other sustainable development issues) during PP implementation is a responsibility of the implementing agency (i.e. initiator), which – once the PP is approved – coordinates its implementation). The SEA should suggest which measures need to be adopted if adverse effects appear; a list of measures might include e.g. initiating changes of the PP, modification of conditions for the implementation of specific projects, consultations with environmental authorities, etc.).



6. SEA report

6.1. Does the SEA report use simple, clear language and avoid or explain technical terms?

Rationale: The SEA report summarizes all results, findings and conclusions made by the SEA and serves for presenting them to all relevant stakeholders. A “reader-friendly” report helps to ensure efficient communication with stakeholders (who understand the information provided by the SEA report) and also enhances chances that suggestions and conclusions will be considered by planners and decision makers.

The SEA report is not an academic or scientific study – information, conclusions and recommendations should be presented in an easily understandable and readable form. It should be clear and apparent what main messages to be considered by relevant stakeholders are. Any extensive technical or other supporting material can be attached as an annex.

6.2. Does the SEA report use maps and other illustrations where appropriate?

Rationale: As the SEA report should be clear and understandable, appropriate use of visuals such as graphs is recommended. Maps, charts, etc., can also be used to substantiate baseline analysis, evaluation, and conclusions.

6.3. Does the SEA report describe the overall approach to the assessment?

Rationale: Description of the overall approach to the SEA, including procedural steps and linkages to the planning process, provides essential background information for full understanding of results and conclusions provided by the SEA and summarized in the SEA report.

6.4. Were the conclusions and recommendations given by the SEA made explicit?

Rationale: Based on analyses and evaluations, the SEA is expected to provide conclusions and recommendations to be considered in the PP finalization and/or in the decision-making (approval) on the PP. These SEA conclusions and recommendations have to be clearly formulated, i.e. explicitly describing (a) what is suggested (certain modification of the PP, further conditions for the PP implementation to be adopted by decision makers, etc.), (b) why it is suggested (e.g. in order to minimize certain adverse effects), (c) what actions are needed (e.g. modify measure XY in the PP, adopt conditions for implementing measure XZ in the PP) and (d) who or which institutions should perform these actions (planning team, decision makers, etc.).

6.5. Does the SEA report clearly state which recommendations and suggestions given by the SEA have been integrated into the plan (i.e. if there were any changes of the plan resulting from the SEA)?

Rationale: Optimally, inputs provided by the SEA are considered already during preparation of the PP and thus integrated into the PP as submitted for decision-making procedure. On the other hand, it is quite legitimate that certain recommendations and suggestions have been refused by planners or integrated only partially (SEA suggestions might be e.g. out of financial scope). However, the final status should be communicated to all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the SEA report should summarize all recommendations and suggestions towards the PP raised during the SEA process and indicate which have been integrated (and how) and which have been refused (and why).

6.6. Does the SEA report explain who was consulted, what methods of consultation were used, and how the conclusions from consultations have been considered in the SEA and/or the assessed PP?

Rationale: Decision makers (as final SEA “customers”), as well as all other relevant stakeholders, should be informed about consultation activities organized within the SEA process since only then can they judge whether the scope of consultations was appropriate. The SEA report also has to summarize all comments and conclusions from the consultation process and indicate which have been integrated (and how) in the SEA report and / or the assessed PP, and which have been refused (and why). This overview serves as a source of verification that the SEA dealt with comments and suggestions made by stakeholders involved.

6.7. Does the SEA report identify sources of information, including expert judgment and matters of opinion?

Rationale: All statements and conclusions in the SEA report have to be substantiated; otherwise, these can be questioned by decision makers and all other stakeholders. References must be given for all used publications, and any material adopted from other sources must be acknowledged.

6.8. Does the SEA report describe technical, procedural, and other difficulties?

Rationale: The SEA team often faces limited data availability, uncertainties in future trends and external factors, planners’ reluctance to communicate, short time-space for providing inputs to the PP, etc. It is important to describe clearly all these problems in the SEA report as a base for correct understanding and acceptance of SEA conclusions and recommendations by the decision makers and other stakeholders.



7. Consultations and stakeholders' participation

7.1. Were the stakeholders to be involved in SEA identified at the beginning of the SEA process?

Rationale: A wide variety of potential stakeholders are involved in each SEA process. For effective consultations all relevant stakeholders must be invited to participate, and no relevant target group left out; and early identification of the main target groups, including stakeholders of an affected country – in the event the PP is subject to a transboundary assessment procedure – helps to avoid such situation.

7.2. Was the consultation and participation plan developed?

Rationale: Proper planning of consultations with stakeholders and their participation in the SEA process is very important for efficient stakeholder involvement, since it provides in advance the information on planned activities to relevant stakeholders, which can get ready and start formulating their inputs beforehand. It helps avoiding potential overlaps with consultations organized within the PP preparation – the consultation and participation plan should be discussed and agreed upon with the planning agency at the beginning of the SEA process. It is also useful for the SEA team, since the identification of the stakeholders to be involved, determining in what stages of the SEA process they should be involved and summarizing expected outputs from consultations is a base for selection of appropriate consultation and communication tools and means.

7.3. Were the consultations and stakeholders' participation within SEA carried out jointly with the PP preparation process?

Rationale: Joint consultations bring mutual benefits both to SEA as well as to the PP preparation – (a) it saves time, experts and financial resources, (b) stakeholders have information about the PP, which is essential for understanding all SEA analyses, evaluation, conclusions and recommendations, and (c) SEA and planning teams can immediately react on suggestions raised by the stakeholders and discuss how these can be integrated into the assessment and/or the PP and thus streamline the consultations process.

7.4. Was the scope of the SEA discussed with planners and stakeholders?

Rationale: The list of issues identified during the scoping stage guides the focus of the entire SEA; therefore, it is essential to discuss the suggested scope with the planning team as well as with other stakeholders (including environmental and health authorities), otherwise some key issues might appear only later in the SEA process and thus complicate and delay progress of the assessment. All inputs from consultations will help to focus SEA on matters which are important for various stakeholders and at the same time accepted by the planning team.

7.5. Were stakeholders consulted in ways and at times that give them an early and effective opportunity within appropriate time frames to express their opinions on the draft PP and SEA report?

Rationale: The SEA report and the draft PP have to be a subject of the stakeholder consultations at the last stage of the SEA (however, the consultations should run during the entire SEA process). Stakeholders need to have an opportunity to participate when all options are still open, i.e. there must be a realistic space for considering the stakeholders' suggestions and comments raised in the SEA or in the assessed PP.

After the evaluation matrix is filled in (i.e. as a result of the work of the Commission of Experts), it can provide a transparent record for the preparation of the formal opinion on the SEA quality and a justification for formulating comments and feedback to the SEA team and the competent authority.



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