

UNECE

at a glance

Espoo Convention



What does becoming a Party involve?

Most countries have a system of environmental impact assessment (EIA); many of the countries of the former Soviet Union have inherited a similar system called state ecological expertise. To implement the Convention, national legislation generally has to be amended to provide for a transboundary EIA procedure. However, the secretariat is often able to organize support for this work. In addition, institutional capacity and awareness need to be raised, notably including awareness in central and local government of the obligation to apply the Convention. Learning about EIA systems in neighbouring countries will help build relationships and ease application of the Convention.

To become a Party, in most cases, an instrument of accession needs to be deposited with the United Nations Secretary General in New York. In the case of those few States that signed the Convention in 1991 but have yet to ratify their signature, an instrument of ratification would need to be deposited.

To find out more:

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What is the Espoo Convention?

The Espoo Convention is the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, adopted in Espoo (Finland) in 1991. It entered into force in 1997 and by the end of 2009 had 44 Parties: 43 States Parties across North America, Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, plus the European Union as a regional organization.

The Convention requires that an environmental impact assessment be carried out for certain types of activity planned usually by one Party, which are likely to have a significant environmental impact within an area under the jurisdiction of another Party. It specifies what has to be considered at an early stage of planning and it lays down the obligation of countries to notify and consult each other and the public. It requires that all comments received from the public and authorities, as well as the findings of the assessment, are taken into account when deciding on the planned activity.

The Convention "is a significant multilateral instrument for achieving sustainable development in the region"

Mr. Chavdar Georgiev
*Deputy Minister of Environment
and Water of the Republic of
Bulgaria.*

What are the benefits of becoming a Party?

The Convention provides a framework for discussing with neighbouring States certain planned developments, whether on your side of the border or theirs. Being a Party obliges other Parties to notify and consult you about planned developments on their territory that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on your country's environment. The Convention can enhance international cooperation, including awareness of the importance of the environment, and so help to avoid conflict.

Sovereignty is retained

The decision-making power remains in the country where the development is planned. Confidentiality is respected: information the supply of which would be prejudicial to industrial and commercial secrecy or national security is protected.

Better development

The project design can be improved, including higher environmental standards, mitigation and compensatory measures that reduce the environmental impact of the project, and measures to adapt to climate change. Project alternatives can be identified. Suggestions may come from the public, assessment experts, the developer and other stakeholders.

Better environmental protection

Key environmental issues of a project can be identified, awareness of the environmental consequences of project implementation raised, environmentally sensitive areas can be avoided by selecting a new site, and environmental impacts avoided or reduced by revising the project design.

Better decision-making

Decision-making can be better informed and more objective, and the assessment can provide a better framework for preparing conditions and legal agreements to govern future operation of the project.

The cost of environmental impact assessment is mostly borne by the developer and, for the types of project subject to the Convention, generally amounts to between 0.1 and 0.5 % of the overall capital cost of the project.

“We value the effectiveness of this instrument for regional cooperation that contributes to trustful relations between neighbours”

Mr. Simon Papyan
First Deputy Minister of Nature Protection of the Republic of Armenia.

“The application of the Espoo Convention in Italy has proved to be highly beneficial, since it has provided the opportunity to share with our neighbour countries EIA practice and methodologies, to transfer know-how, and to contribute, through fruitful collaboration, to the protection of unique ecosystems, like the Alps and Mediterranean Sea”

Mr. Paolo Soprano
Director, Ministry for the Environment and Territory, Italy.

