

# **Improving skills of NGOs to participate in procedures under the UNECE SEA Protocol**

**Mara Silina/European ECO Forum**

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# **Briefly about the project « Improving skills of NGOs of EECCA to participate in procedures according to the UNECE SEA Protocol »**

**Target countries: Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia**

**Beneficiaries: Environmental NGOs**

**Project partners: European ECO Forum, Resource & Analysis Center « Society and Environment » (Ukraine) and Oekobuero (Austria)**

**Project duration: 01.04.2021 – 31.12.2022**

**Financial support: German Federal Environment Ministry's Advisory Assistance Programme(AAP) for environmental protection in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia and other countries neighbouring the European Union. It was supervised by the German Environment Agency (UBA)**



# Goal of the project

**To Strengthen capacity of environmental civil society organisation in the EECCA region to use SEA tools in greening infrastructure related plans and programmes**



# **Implementation was organised in 3 stages:**

**Project focussed on infrastructure plans/programmes related to transport sector.**

- 1. Online training for NGOs and selection of NGOs for further work on pilot SEA reports**
- 2. Developing simulation SEA reports based on real infrastructure plans/projects (adopted or draft)**
- 3. Final seminar to share experience, recommendations and lessons learned with wider audience**

# Who was involved

**Five organisations were selected on the basis of expression of their interest and relevance of the proposed plan/programme for their work.**

**They are:**

- **NGO « Ecohome » (Belarus)**
- **NGO « Research-Intellectual Club 'Dialogue of Generations' (RIGDOG)(Georgia)**
- **NGO « Center ecology-legal initiative 'Globus' (Kazakhstan)**
- **NGO « Youth Group for Environment Protection » (Tajikistan)**
- **NGO « Black Sea Women's Club » (Ukraine)**

# Main challenges in preparation of the (pilot) SEA reports

## ➤ Access to and collection of necessary information and data

- **different registers and databases which are not always easy and straightforward to access, especially at local level**
- **Not always reliable**
- **Absence of certain research and data or lack of access to existing ones**
- **Sometimes information provided for a fee**

## ➤ Public consultations in the SEA process

- **Information and documentation for consultations often available too late and not widely disseminated**
- **Lack of time to prepare substantial comments**
- **Political situation in the country (Belarus)**

## ➤ Methodology

- **Can be a challenge, especially in the scoping phase**
- **Checking out earlier SEA reports showed the use of different methodologies but no instruction for their use**
- **Proposed methodologies themselves didn't give necessary picture – too general or insufficient**

# Lessons learned

- **SEA carried out in its original sense – not as formality**
- **Needs to include scientific studies as the object of assessment**
- **Prioritisation and impartiality are important when preparing the SEA report**
- **Not all local experts are open to cooperation, especially when SEA object is of interest to influential investors with ties to authorities**
- **Quite often experts or necessary/crucial information are not available at all**

# Main recommendations

- **Sufficient time for public consultations and public hearings, information must be publicly available, take into account the proposals and comments received, publish final version with explanations which provisions and for what reasons were accepted or rejected**
- **Citizens, NGOs, other groups, including opinion leaders should actively participate in public consultations on environmental reports**
- **Recognise a strong role for civil society organisations when holding public hearings**
- **The SEA requires additional resources - perhaps allocation of appropriate funds from the budget for the planning authorities for the implementation of the SEA**
- **Group of experts should be identified and details for their participation developed to ensure good quality SEA report**



# Main recommendations

- **Need to create some kind of the SEA working group composed from wide range of experts relevant for the plan/programme in question**
- **Field works by experts should be planned**
- **NGOs with relevant expertise need to organise seminars, trainings, webinars for wide public**
- **Civil society organisations could create informal networks or mailing lists of similar organisation and experts interested in exchange of information on the sites where the SEA is implemented etc.**
- **The SEA does not end with the adoption of the state planning document. SEA monitoring is extremely important as it helps to notice the onset of certain negative consequences and timely amend the relevant state planning document after its approval**

# Project results

- **Practical hands-on experience to prepare SEA reports with professional guidance by the SEA expert**
- **Five SEA Excellence Centers established**
- **Five country specific experience reports (in English and Russian) with lessons learnt as well as a general regional report prepared**
- **Video reports produced to increase communication skills, visibility of the new skills and competence in SEA of our five SEA Excellence Centers (in the language of their choice) and a general video report in English and Russian**
- **Side event organised during the EfE Ministerial Conference in Nicosia (October 5-7, 2022)**



# Where to find all this information

**European ECO Forum website:**

**<http://www.eco-forum.org/node/81>**

**RACSE website:**

**<https://www.rac.org.ua/en/priorities/environmental-policy-instruments/strategic-environmental-assessment/sea-excellence-centers-2022>**

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**And last but not least our sponsors:**

