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EU4Environment

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine

Online Training on the Practical Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Regional and Spatial Planning

Republic of Azerbaijan, April 26 – 27, 2021

Workshop Report

Action implemented by:



Contents

- 1. Background..... 3
- 2. Workshop objectives..... 4
- 3. Approach and methodology..... 4
- 4. Summary of the Workshop outcomes 5
- 5. Conclusions..... 7
- 6. Acknowledgements 7
- Annex 1: Workshop agenda 8
- Annex 2: List of Participants 8

1. Background

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a tool for examining the environmental risks associated with implementation of plans or programs (such as those elaborating reforms and medium – and long-term investments in a specific sector or several sectors, e.g., water, energy, transport as well as spatial and urban planning). This enables a framework for environmental management and monitoring to be agreed and built into the elements of both the urban planning and sector-specific strategic plans and their implementation mechanisms. Integration of the environmental (include climate and public health) concerns while preparing and implementing plans or programs ensures that investments and related operations are designed and implemented in ways that take into account environmental policy priorities and objectives. This ensures that potentially negative impacts of development are identified early on in the planning process; actions can then be taken to either adjust development plans in order to avoid these negative impacts, or parallel actions can be taken to Following the principles and procedures laid down in the UNECE Protocol on SEA to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) and in the European Union's Directive on SEA (2001/42/EC), Azerbaijan is implementing the SEA to allow for identification of the most sustainable and cost-effective strategic development alternatives and attracting new investments, while safeguarding and improving the environment. When applied effectively, the SEA also helps strengthen the country's environmental governance through fostering transparency and consultation with relevant stakeholders and the public prior to the approval of plans and programmes. SEA in a transboundary context can also greatly facilitate regional cooperation on environmental matters. Spatial planning, including regional plans, is one of the biggest and most comprehensive sectors of SEA application with considerable developments over the past decades and the vast experience available, in particular, from countries in the European Union.

Within the framework of the European Union funded EU4Environment programme (2019-2022), UNECE is assisting the Eastern Partnership countries, including Azerbaijan, in comprehensive capacity-building and institutional building for SEA and transboundary EIA and in finalizing legal reforms in this area.

The application of SEA in practice however remains rather limited in the country as the overall institutional capacities for SEA require significantly more strengthening to be fully fit for purpose. There is still a need to support environmental, health and sectoral planning authorities through capacity-building and awareness-raising activities addressing, inter alia, relevant procedures and challenges as well as respective roles of different authorities and stakeholders in the implementation of SEA procedures.

Since 2004, UNECE has been providing technical assistance and capacity-building support related to SEA and transboundary EIA including in Eastern Europe. This support was provided under the European Union funded EaP GREEN programme in 2013-2018 and is currently being provided under EU4Environment

This workshop was the first of two SEA training workshops under the EU4Environment workplan for Azerbaijan. Along with the workplan's other SEA-related activities, it promotes more systematic and effective application of SEA in accordance with the UNECE Protocol on SEA, EU SEA Directive and the national legislation on SEA. It is dedicated to the application of SEA in the context of Regional and Spatial Planning, which constitute a very significant but also specific and challenging domain of SEA application. The webinar was facilitated by SEA consultants to UNECE.

2. Workshop objectives

As a result of restrictions applied in global as well as in national scale due to COVID 19 pandemic the events and trainings are transferred to online platforms using various software applications and programs. The online Workshop on Practical Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Regional and Spatial Planning was designed as a combined SEA training and awareness raising event with a focus on the implementation of the SEA procedures in upcoming future in Azerbaijan. Therefore, the main objectives of the workshop are to:

- Enhance capacities for the application of SEA in Azerbaijan in line with the requirements of the UNECE Protocol on SEA, EU SEA Directive and the national legislation on SEA.
- Support the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources in raising awareness about the SEA, SEA-related regulatory framework and its application;
- Facilitate the engagement of key stakeholders and exchange of experience on SEA in the Regional and Spatial planning context.

The workshop is expected to help to further engage relevant stakeholders to participate in SEA implementation effort and to facilitate expert discussion on practical application of SEA in Azerbaijan.

3. Approach and methodology

In line with the above objectives, the Workshop was organized based on the following approach: Its participants were selected with the intention of raising awareness among key stakeholders of the SEA, i.e. line ministries and agencies likely to be involved in the preparation of plans and programs subject to SEA is applicable, as well as representatives of environmental authorities responsible for the SEA process and likely to be involved in SEA-related consultations, and other potential stakeholders.

The meeting was organized as a virtual event via Zoom. All registered participants received connection details to access the platform. Simultaneous interpretation in English and Azerbaijani had been provided.

Design of the workshop program included the following key components in line with the event's objectives described above:

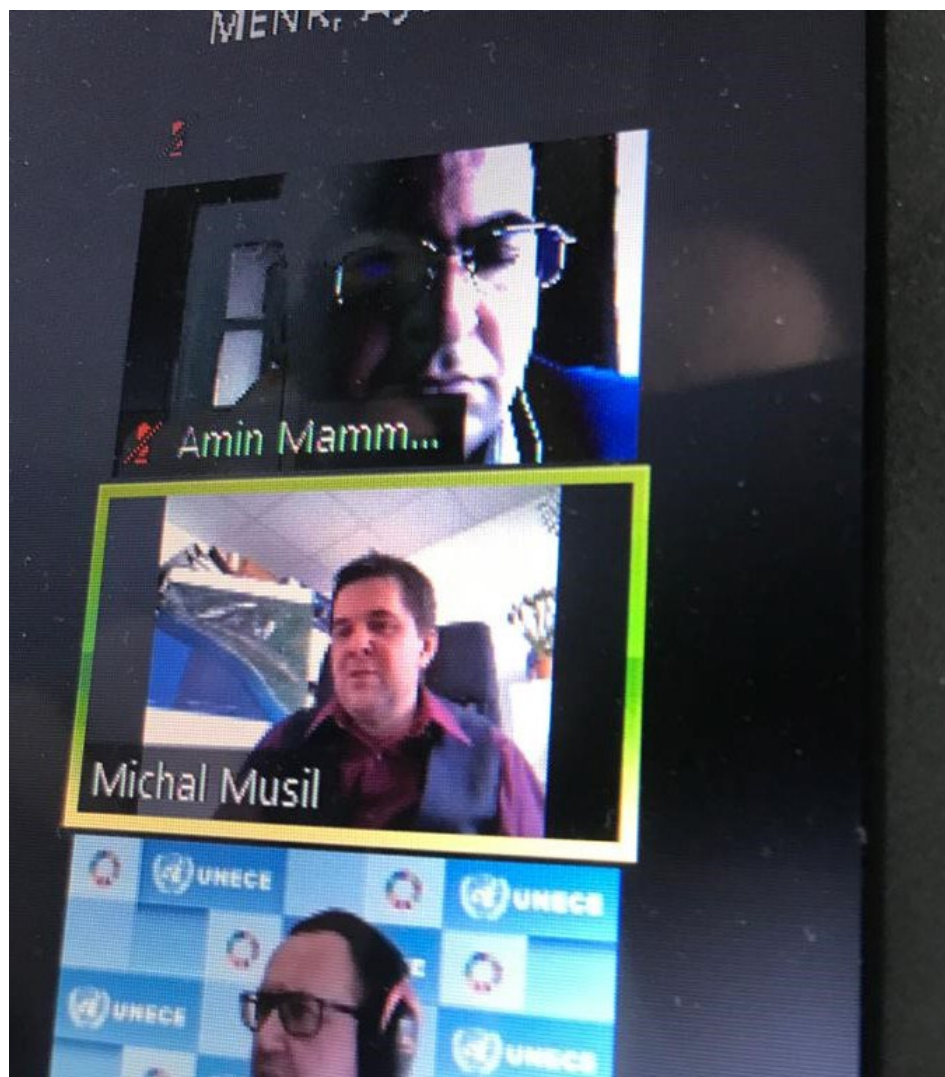
- Introduction of the SEA concept and the rationale for implementing SEA in the context of Azerbaijan, including information on the international legal framework and commitments of the Republic of Azerbaijan under the SEA Protocol.
- Typical SEA steps and procedures implemented within the application of SEA, key deliverables.
- Presentation of the EU Directive 2001/42/EC on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programs on the environment implemented in EU countries
- Varying integration of SEA Directive into national and regional legislation, practice and flexibility.
- Benefits of SEA, including: provision of high level of environmental protection, Improvement of quality of P/P making, increasing efficiency of decision-making, facilitation of identification of new development opportunities, assisting in prevention of costly mistakes, strengthening governance, enhancing transboundary cooperation.

A significant portion of the allocated time was dedicated to the interactive discussion of 2 real urban plans recently developed in Azerbaijan. Selected pieces of information and maps taken from these real cases were used to demonstrate typical environmental issues and challenges encountered when conducting SEA for urban and regional planning documents. The discussion was facilitated by the national consultant familiar with the background and local context of the case studies and participants were encouraged to make use of their respective knowledge of the real situation.

4. Summary of the online webinar outcomes

The webinar had been conducted on April 26 and 27, 2021 with participation of the representatives of UNECE, international expert, representative of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan and participants of the meeting from various stakeholder institutions. Close to 30 participants from state bodies, private sector and civil society organizations of the country (relevant departments of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture, Ministry of Transportation, Communication and High Technologies, Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs, consulting companies) took active part in 2 webinar days through online platform.

The UNECE SEA consultants actively engaged with the participants namely through a discussion of the practical aspects of the SEA application, and existing barriers and challenges hindering the SEA practice development.



Following key topics were addressed and discussed:

The event was opened by the Head of Subdivision of International Cooperation Department of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources Ms. Aysel Rzayeva on April 26, 2021. She highlighted the importance of environmental protection through two important instruments/procedures, SEA and EIA. The application of these instruments in Azerbaijan needs to be strengthened for the authorities to apply them effectively, and for the proponents and initiators to use them competently when planning and implementing a specific activity that fall under the national legislation.

EU4Environment Project Manager at UNECE, Mr. Leonid Kalashnyk, in his subsequent statement highlighted the importance of the EU-funded EU4Environment Program to address needs identified by Azerbaijan for further capacity building for the effective SEA application and outlined activities to assist the country in this area.

In the opening session, national consultant Mr. Amin Mammadov, together with international consultant Mr. Michal Musil introduced the objectives and agenda of the event, and provided a brief summary of the key SEA-relevant outcomes of the previous EaP GREEN program. The subsequent sessions facilitated by the UNECE consultants produced a number of topics for further discussion (see a summary of key points/questions in the table below).

A presentation made by Mr. Leonid Kalashnyk, UNECE, briefly outlined the UNECE SEA Protocol and provided a summary of the EU4Environment Programme. It had also covered the topics Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): Purpose, legal framework, process and benefits, objective, principles and benefits, procedural steps, UNECE Protocol on SEA, EU SEA Directive, Implementation challenges and opportunities in the region.

After Mr. Kalashnyk Mrs. Aysel Rzayeva talked about practical experience from the pilot SEA applications in Azerbaijan.

Following to these introduction sessions presentations made by the international consultant Mr. Michal Musil too during the first day of the webinar. He had covered the topics, such as SEA for Regional and Spatial Plans: On selected case examples based on real SEAs from countries in the EU and UNECE region (e.g. Czech Republic, Slovakia, Turkey) he illustrated approaches, methods, typical tasks, interesting problems of SEA practice.. The session was followed by interactive discussions with participants addressing questions and comments.

The concluding remarks for the first day of the webinar were made by the representative of UNECE Mr. Kalashnyk.

The second day of the webinar started with the continuing presentations of by the international consultant Mr. Michal Musil. He presented interesting examples from European Countries and Turkey on practical aspects of application of SEA in infrastructure and development projects.

Then the local consultant Amin Mammadov continued with the sessions where master plans of 2 cities of Azerbaijan had been used as an examples for providing background information about the land use plans for those cities – i.e. introducing a realistic context in which the SEA will be applied in the future. Following those presentations the national consultant encouraged participants of the webinar to share their comments and ideas along with the questions related to various aspects of SEA. Participants gave their comments and proposals taking into account the facts they were provided and employing the general SEA-related knowledge obtained from the previous sessions delivered by the UNECE consultants.

5. Conclusions

The 2 days webinar succeeded in raising awareness of the participants about the SEA in general, and recent SEA-related obligations introduced into the legal framework in the Republic of Azerbaijan. The webinar highlighted the pressing need of the relevant authorities to increase their capacities for the effective application of the SEA procedure. In that respect, the envisaged SEA-related activities to be further implemented by UNECE under the EU-funded EU4Environment Programme were noted as a substantial benefit for Azerbaijan in this area.

6. Acknowledgements

The workshop was jointly prepared by the UNECE Secretariat and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The Workshop was facilitated by Michal Musil (Integra Consulting Ltd.), Leonid Kalashnyk (UNECE) and Mrs. Aysel Rzayeva (MENR Azerbaijan).

Annex 1: Workshop agenda



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Training Workshop on the Practical Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Regional and Spatial Planning

Draft Agenda

26-27 April 2021

Baku, Azerbaijan

Due to COVID-19, this workshop will be delivered as a virtual event, using the Zoom platform. All registered participants will receive connection details to access the platform.

Training Workshop on the Practical Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Regional and Spatial Planning

26-27 April 2021

14:00 Baku time

AGENDA

DAY 1, 26 April

Time (Baku)	Item
13:30 – 14.00	Connection testing (30 min)
14:00 – 14.15	Welcoming remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Representative of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan (tbc)</i> • <i>Representative of the EU Delegation to Azerbaijan (tbc)</i> • <i>Mr. Leonid Kalashnyk, Environmental Affairs Officer, EU4Environment Project Manager at UNECE</i>
14:15 – 14:30	Meeting objectives and agenda, introduction of participants <i>Facilitated by consultant to UNECE</i>
14:30 – 15.00	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA): Purpose, legal framework, process and benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective, principles and benefits • Procedural steps • UNECE Protocol on SEA, EU SEA Directive • Implementation challenges and opportunities in the region <i>Presentations by consultant to UNECE and Leonid Kalashnyk</i>
15:00 – 15:15	SEA in Azerbaijan: Legislation and practical experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent developments of the national legal framework for SEA <i>Presentation by Ms. Aysel Rzayeva, Head of Subdivision, International Cooperation Division, focal point to the Espoo Convention, Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practical experience from the pilot SEA applications in Azerbaijan <i>Presentation by national consultant to UNECE</i>
15:15 – 15.30	Break
15:30 – 16:15	SEA and Regional and Spatial Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental analysis within Planning and SEA • Opportunities and challenges • Typical key environmental problems <i>Presentation by consultant to UNECE</i> Questions and answers
16:15 – 17:00	SEA for Regional and Spatial Plans: Selected case examples <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches, methods, typical tasks, interesting problems illustrated based on real SEAs from countries in the EU and UNECE region (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Turkey)

	Interactive discussion <i>Facilitated by consultants to UNECE</i>
17:00 – 17:10	Concluding remarks of Day 1 <i>Leonid Kalashnyk, UNECE</i>

DAY 2, 27 April

Time (Baku)	Item
13:45 – 14:00	Connection testing (15 min)
14:00 – 14:15	Reflection on Day 1 <i>Facilitated by consultant to UNECE</i>
14:15 – 15:30	Hypothetical SEA for a city Master Plan in Azerbaijan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SEA process, approaches, methods, typical tasks, likely problems and issues in the context of a selected real Master Plan in Azerbaijan Interactive discussion – group work <i>Facilitated by consultants to UNECE</i>
15:30 – 15:45	Break
15:45 – 16:30	SEA in Spatial Planning: Key issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cumulative and synergic effects Indirect effects Uncertainties Public participation SEA and Decision making <i>Presentation by consultant to UNECE</i> Questions and answers
16:30 – 17:00	Concluding discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key takeaways from the workshop What next for SEA in Azerbaijan? Interactive discussion <i>Facilitated by consultant to UNECE and Leonid Kalashnyk, UNECE</i>

Annex 2: List of Participants



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Training Workshop on the Practical Application of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in Regional and Spatial Planning

26-27 April 2021

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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Total number of participants: 34

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