

Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA)

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What is it?

- Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment (SEIA)/Strategic Environmental Assessment is a systematic process for **evaluating the environmental implications of a proposed policy, plan or programme and provides means for looking at cumulative effects** and appropriately addressing them at the earliest stage of decision making alongside economic and social considerations.
- It is the assessment of the wider environmental, social and economic impacts of alternative proposals at the beginning of a project. That is, at the decision stage the policy, planning or program (PPP) level.
- The concept of strategic assessments originated from regional development / land use planning in the developed world.

The SEA assesses the extent to which a given policy, plan or programme:

- provides an adequate response to environmental and climate change-related challenges;
- may adversely affect the environment and climate resilience, and
- offers opportunities to enhance the state of the environment and contribute to climate-resilient and low-carbon development.

Usage of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

In the pan-European region, SEA is applied earlier in the decision making to government plans, programmes and policy

documents in accordance with requirements of the UNECE Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment to the Espoo Convention (Protocol on SEA)

Problems with SEA

Despite its benefits SEA is still a rarely used tool in the countries due to a number of obstacles, including

- Low level of awareness of SEA and its benefits among public authorities
- Weak legislative and institutional framework for its application
- Lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of various authorities in the SEA process; and
- The absence of specific guidelines and practical experience in the application of SEA.

Its relation with Environmental Impact Assessment(EIA)

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and EIA effectively promote sustainable development by mainstreaming the environment into economic development and integrating green economy targets into strategic and project-related decision-making.
- SEA and EIA are procedures that ensure that the environmental implications of decisions are taken into account before the decisions are made
- Compared with the EIA, SEA provides recommendations at a strategic level and allows a better control over interactions or cumulative effects.
- There is no single approach to SEA, which can take different forms according to the specific needs.
- For the most part, an SEIA is conducted before a corresponding EIA is undertaken.
- This means that information on the environmental impact of a plan can cascade down through the tiers of decision making and can be used in an EIA at a later stage.

- This should reduce the amount of work that needs to be undertaken.