

# Strategic environmental assessment

## OVERVIEW

### What is it?

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) evaluates the environmental implications of a proposed policy, plan or programme and provides a means for looking at cumulative effects. The SEA assesses the extent to which a given policy, plan or programme (A) provides an adequate response to environmental and climate change-related challenges, (B) may adversely affect the environment, climate resilience or contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, and (C) offers opportunities to enhance the state of the environment and contribute to climate-resilient and low-carbon development.

### What can it be used for?

SEA is a flexible instrument that can take multiple forms, depending on the context in which it is used. In EU development cooperation SEA is mainly used in the following situations:

When providing budget support to an environmentally sensitive sector (Agriculture, rural development and food security; infrastructure and transport; water and sanitation; private sector development; and energy). In this case the SEA can provide inputs to assess the quality of the sector strategy to be supported and provide recommendations on the focus of the EU support programme as well as on the performance indicators.

- When providing broad support to an environmentally sensitive sector, in which case the SEA can provide recommendations for the formulation of the EU support programme;
- When an action includes the support to the development or update of a national sector strategy for an environmentally sensitive sector, in which case an SEA should be foreseen as part of that support.

The SEA can produce recommendations to enhance the environment and climate change performance of an EU support programme, as well as recommendations to the national partners to enhance their sector policies or strategies. Recommendations to national policies and strategies can also be addressed by the EU through its policy dialogue with the partner government.

### When can it be used?

To assess the quality of a sector strategy during the assessment of the eligibility criteria for budget support.

When broad support to a sector is foreseen, prior (or during) formulation, to inform the formulation of the EU support programme.

When an intervention foresees supporting the development or update of a national or sectoral policy or strategy, during implementation of the corresponding intervention component.

### Who can use it?

- EU staff involved in: assessing eligibility criteria for budget support and formulation of interventions acting at a strategic level. Also for national partners, as the SEA can also provide insight into how sectoral development policies and strategies can better address environmental sustainability and climate concerns.

### What are its strengths?

- It provides recommendations to both the EU and the national partners, to enhance the formulation of EU support programmes and that of national policies and strategies, respectively.
- It can provide performance indicators for budget support.
- It allows to highlight key environmental and climate-related issues associated to sector development, and opportunities to minimise risks and maximise impact, and generate awareness of these issues.
- Elements identified by the SEA can feed into policy dialogue.

### What are its limitations?

- SEAs are not standard processes, and they need to be carefully designed so they become meaningful.
- Ownership of the partner government is ideal, but can often be difficult to secure.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

### Key elements

The need for a SEA is determined by a screening process (Annex 3 of the Guidelines). A SEA consists of the following typical components: (A) screening; (B) scoping; (C) identification of impacts and opportunities; (iv) impact assessment; (v) analysis of alternatives; (vi) SEA report. Public participation should be integrated throughout the process.

### Requirements

**Data/information.** Preparation of a SEA requires extensive literature review and stakeholder consultations. Depending on the scope of the SEA, primary data may need to be generated. Qualitative analyses tend to be more common, but quantitative elements may be necessary to a certain extent. Various assessment methodologies are available.

**Time.** The time can vary considerably depending on the purpose of the SEA, the complexity of the sector in question, the availability of primary data, and the need (or not) to organise field visits to remote areas.

SEAs integrated into strategic planning processes (e.g. when the EU supports the preparation of a sector strategy) would take as long as the planning process itself. SEAs aimed at providing an indication of the risks and opportunities associated to a sector strategy can be completed in a shorter period. An average estimate could be made at four months.

**Skills.** It is fundamental to have a Team Leader that is well acquainted with SEA, and that can understand the needs of the EU vis-à-vis the SEA. The team should be complemented by expertise on the sector, country/region. Knowledge of the local language(s) is often necessary but could be complemented by interpreters and translators. Further details on expertise required can be found in the model ToR for a SEA (Annex 5 of the Guidelines).

**Facilities and materials.** N/A

**Financial costs and sources.** The size of the SEA team and the time needed to complete it can vary considerably, depending on the scope of the SEA. Various SEAs in the context of EU development cooperation have consisted of teams of two to three experts, although in more complex analyses larger teams may be required to ensure all skills are covered. As a rough indication, we could say that for more average SEAs in the context of EU development cooperation, some 100-150 person days may be considered. As SEAs typically involve two discrete phases (i.e. one for scoping and the other for the SEA study proper), two separate missions are normally required. In addition, costs for internal travel (field visits), stakeholder workshops and (sometimes) interpreter costs need to be foreseen.

**Tips and tricks.**

SEAs require careful planning. A SEA Booklet [Strategic Environmental Assessment in EU development cooperation, A handful of tips to get it right!](#) is available with tips for a successful SEA.

## RESOURCES

### Where to find it

The European Commission, Tools and Methods Series, 2016. [Guidelines N. 6, Integrating the environment and climate change into EU international cooperation and development](#) (Annex 5, Terms of reference for a Strategic Environmental Assessment).

The European Commission (EC), 2017. [Strategic Environmental Assessment in EU development cooperation, A handful of tips to get it right!](#)

### Complementary guides, methodologies and tools

OECD, DAC Guidelines and Reference Series, 2006. [Applying Strategic Environmental Assessment, Good practice guidance for development co-operation](#)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2018. [Integrated Strategic Environmental Assessments in Post-Crisis Countries](#)