

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The European Commission has appointed Environmental Resources Management to carry out a survey of Member States' use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in relation to the transport sector.

The survey was based mainly on a series of interviews with environment representatives of national governments. For Austria, Germany, Finland, the United Kingdom and the regional government of Castilla y León-Spain we were also able to interview representatives of the transport administrations. Greece is the only country from which we were unable to obtain details within the timescale of the project. The interviews provided an overview of SEA legislation and practice at the national level. In the case of Italy and Spain we were also able to interview regional government representatives.

The study provides an overview of which countries have legal requirements for SEA of transport policies, plans and programmes (PPP), and which countries have practical experience of SEA in the transport sector.

The results of these interviews suggest that the 14 countries assessed can be divided into three broad groups:

- **“established”** - countries which have an established history of SEA of transport, supported by legal requirements (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands);
- **“progressing”** - countries which are moving towards a consistent application of SEA of transport PPPs, through various means (pilot studies, proposed national legislation and/or existing regional legislation on SEA, extended-EIAs which have SEA components), (Flanders, Ireland, Italy, United Kingdom, some Spanish regions, and France); and
- **“wait and see”** - countries which have chosen to postpone action until the proposed Directive has been approved (Austria, Brussels and Wallonia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Germany and Spain-national level) .

The experience of those countries which have embraced SEA, choosing to test this new methodology and develop it in order to maximise benefits, can be very important for other Member States. The main lessons learned are summarised below:

- *Legislation and consistency*  
The existence of SEA legislation ensures a more consistent application of SEA to a range of PPPs, the carrying out of more comprehensive evaluations (compared to ad-hoc or pilot studies), and greater influence of the results in relation to the final decision;

- *Understanding environmental impacts at the strategic level:*  
SEA contributes to a clearer understanding of the environmental implications of transport PPPs, but not only this. Countries like Sweden are now realising that SEA provides a more efficient approach to both policy development and implementation, by avoiding sub-optimal decisions and costly opposition processes. SEA can provide a good framework to ensure coherence between transport PPPs and environmental/sustainability objectives (international, national and local);
- *Improved collaboration and efficiency in decision-making*  
In some cases the SEA process is credited with having contributed to an improvement in communication and collaboration between the various institutions involved in transport, land-use and environment issues. Also, Member States where SEA is effectively integrated with existing planning and assessment practices for some years, have found that it can improve the efficiency of the decision-making process;
- *Positive effects on subsequent project-EIAs*  
SEAs can lead to the early exclusion of adverse projects, or simply to a ranking of projects which highlights the most sustainable ones. This results in a reduction of the number of strategic alternatives and projects which will need to be considered at subsequent planning stages;
- *Transparency and public participation*  
An SEA process will lead to increased transparency and to greater involvement of the public. However, to date the inclusion of full and meaningful participation has been limited. Thus, the benefits tend to be more a reflection of Member States expectations of future outcomes.

It should be noted that the countries in the “established” group tend to have small government administrations if compared to the other Member States, and this is likely to have some influence on their ability to progress SEA more quickly. For example, in Finland the relatively small size of the public administration has meant that officials from different departments often know each other, making it easier to co-ordinate and collaborate.

The interviewees also identified a number of obstacles, including:

- *Lack of expertise:*  
Two very different views were expressed in relation to “lack of expertise” as an obstacle to SEA. Countries with a lot of experience felt that this was indeed still a problem and were embarking in research and training programmes, to address the complexities of integrating SEA into planning and ensuring that the results of the assessment are capable of informing and influencing the final decision. On the other hand, countries which had limited or no experience were more inclined to consider EIA expertise as a sufficient basis to develop SEA. This could have negative impacts on the way SEA will be applied to PPPs in these countries, for example by limiting the range and nature of alternatives considered;

- *Lack of communication/collaboration:*  
Some countries have mentioned that poor communication and sometimes lack of collaboration at the institutional level can be a problem. This seems to be less of a problem in countries which are carrying out SEAs on a regular basis;
- *Additional bureaucracy:*  
Undoubtedly, having to adopt and carry out a new assessment process will result in some additional work and procedures which may involve longer timescales. In a limited number of countries this was seen as a major obstacle.

Finally, the review of experience in the 14 Member States shows that there remains quite a difference in the way an SEA is structured, even in those countries with an established history in the application of SEA to transport. The less common SEA stages include public participation, determination of measures for mitigation of environmental impacts and measures for monitoring the implementation of PPPs. Alternatives are considered, however the range and nature of options varies significantly.

Thus, to date, concrete progress in the systematic application of SEA to the transport sector, with a clear consideration of its results by decision-makers, remains limited to a few countries only.