

Developing effective ex ante social impact assessment with a focus on methodology, tools and data sources

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1. Introduction ²

Ex ante impact assessment is a tool and process to estimate the likely future impacts of policy proposals, and a social impact assessment (or SIA) concerns domains other than economic, fiscal or environmental (Box 1 sets out more precisely what we understand by the term social impact assessment).

The purpose of the 2011 Peer Review in Brussels is to discuss how Member States can best develop effective ex ante social impact assessment; the intention is to focus the discussion on methodology, tools and data sources, rather than on processes, structures, or measures to stimulate demand for SIAs. The discussion will be focused on tools and methods for performing ex ante impact assessments, rather than on tools and methods to produce ex post estimates of the causal impact of a programme. And the focus will be on “impact assessments”, rather than “evaluation” more broadly.

Section 2 of this note summarises recent developments in SIA, beginning with the 2008 Peer Review in Bratislava and ending with the objectives for the 2011 Peer Review. Sections 3 and 4 then discuss the participants’ responses to an initial questionnaire, and suggests some issues which could be explored further at the meeting.

Box 1. Definitions of social impact assessment

Ex ante impact assessment can be understood as a tool and process to estimate the likely future impacts of policy proposals. There is no universally accepted definition of what ‘social’ impacts are. The guidance for the European Commission’s integrated impact assessment system recognises 11 types of social impacts: ¹

- employment and labour markets;
- standards and rights related to job quality;
- social inclusion and protection of particular groups;
- equality of treatment and opportunities;
- non-discrimination;
- private and family life, and personal data;
- governance, participation, good administration, access to justice, media and ethics;
- public health and safety;
- crime, terrorism and security;
- access to and effects on social protection, health and educational systems, and culture;
- social impacts in third countries.

¹ The author particularly wishes to thank Peter Lelie, Federal Public Service Social Security (Belgium), both for his enthusiasm for this project, and for his work to devise the questionnaire, both of which have been crucial to the success of this Peer Review.

² Some of this text is taken from the introduction to the questionnaire (written by Peter Lelie).

This is a very broad list, and a study has argued that the vast majority of social impacts can be summarised under a relatively limited list of impact types, namely:¹

- i. employment (including labour market standards and rights);
- ii. income;
- iii. access to services (including education, social services, etc...);
- iv. respect for fundamental rights (including equality);
- v. public health and safety.

1. In this paper, we will have in mind these 5 main impact types.

References:

The Evaluation Partnership – CEPS, “Study on Social Impact Assessment as a tool for mainstreaming social inclusion and social protection concerns in public policy in the EU Member States”. June 2010: p. 5. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=nl&catId=750&newsId=935&furtherNews=yes>
European Commission Impact Assessment Guidelines. 15 January 2009. See Table 2, page 35-36. http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/commission_guidelines/docs/iag_2009_en.pdf

2. From the 2008 Peer Review in Bratislava to the 2011 Peer Review in Brussels

In November 2008, a Peer Review in Bratislava (Slovakia) allowed a general exchange of views on the subject of social impact assessment³, but also launched a PROGRESS-funded study on social impact assessment as a tool for mainstreaming social protection and social inclusion concerns in public policy in the EU Member States. The objective of the study was to describe, compare and analyse different ways in which social impact assessment is carried out in the Member States, and to identify recommendations for the implementation of effective social impact assessment.

The results of the study were published in 2010.⁴ We discuss the detailed results below, but we note for now that it concluded that SIA (either as a stand-alone process or as part of an integrated impact assessment system) was still in its infancy in most EU Member States, but that there were examples of good practice.

Social impact assessment and the European Commission

At the same time as the PROGRESS-funded study, efforts were undertaken to strengthen the assessment of social impacts within the European Commission’s integrated impact assessment system, partly in response to an external evaluation of the system which had suggested there was room for improvement⁵. DG Employment commissioned two studies on ex ante social impact assessment methodology:

³ Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion on Social Impact Assessment in Bratislava (Slovakia) 6-7 November 2008: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu/peer-reviews/2008/social-impact-assessment>.

⁴ The Evaluation Partnership – CEPS Study on Social Impact Assessment as a tool for mainstreaming social inclusion and social protection concerns in public policy in the EU Member States. June 2010: p. 5. <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=nl&catId=750&newsId=935&furtherNews=yes>

⁵ The Evaluation Partnership The Evaluation of the Commission’s Impact Assessment System. Final Report. April 2007, p. 45. http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/key_docs/docs/tep_eias_final_report.pdf

- ECORYS – Idea Consult, “Study Assessing the Employment and Social Impacts of Selected Strategic Commission Policies” (published in early 2009)⁶;
- ECORYS – IZA, “Study on Methodologies Applied for the Assessment of Employment and Social Impacts” (published early 2010)⁷.

Furthermore, guidance was developed in order to help Commission DGs which are not immediately familiar with social impact assessment to prepare integrated impact assessments, in particular:

- “Guidance for assessing Social Impacts within the Commission Impact Assessment System” (17/11/2009)⁸;
- “Operational Guidance on taking account of Fundamental Rights in Commission Impact Assessments” (6/05/2011)⁹.

Of course, the European Commission also provides an important contribution to the development of indicators and harmonised data sources (e.g. EU-SILC) and to tools for policy analysis and impact assessments (e.g. EUROMOD).

Other developments

The Europe 2020 strategy, adopted by the EU in 2010, aims for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and quantified targets have been agreed at EU level in five areas: employment, innovation, climate change / energy, education, poverty and social exclusion. Governments have agreed a common target that the European Union should lift at least 20 million people out of poverty and social exclusion in the next decade, and complementary national targets for all 27 Member States will follow. Member States have agreed to put forward strategies that will lead to progress in all areas.

The importance of ex ante social impact assessment was emphasised in the “European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion” (which is the EU contribution to addressing the challenges of Poverty and Social Exclusion within the Europe 2020 Strategy). This concluded that:

“Better policy coordination means that the social impact of policy initiatives needs to be carefully assessed and that potentially adverse social consequences should be minimised through equity-orientated and poverty-focused measures. The European Commission has subjected all major initiatives and legislative proposals to a comprehensive impact assessment (IA), including the social dimension. The Commission will continue to refine and improve the quality of its impact assessment to ensure that attention is paid to the social dimension. It is important that other EU Institutions when modifying the Commission's proposals and the Member States at national level assess the social dimension of their own proposals.”¹⁰

⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=2279&langId=en>.

⁷ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=5543&langId=en>.

⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4215&langId=en>

⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/governance/impact/key_docs/docs/sec_2011_0567_en.pdf

¹⁰ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0758:FIN:EN:PDF>

The Social Protection Committee, when assessing the social dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy, concluded that “it will also be important that Member States reinforce their capacity to assess the social impacts of their major policy and spending decisions.”¹¹ In the light of the Europe 2020 strategy, the objectives of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) for social protection and social inclusion were revised slightly. The OMC has three over-arching objectives, and a number of objectives applying to each of the three work strands.¹² By helping Member States to learn from each other and build their capacity to undertake SIAs, this Peer Review will contribute to one of the overarching objectives (“to promote good governance, transparency and the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of policy”) and to one of the objectives in the work strand entitled “A decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion” (in particular, “ensuring that social inclusion policies are well-coordinated and involve all levels of government and relevant actors, including people experiencing poverty, that they are efficient and effective and mainstreamed into all relevant public policies, including economic, budgetary, education and training policies and structural fund (notably ESF) programmes”).

Of course, alongside these institutional developments, the current financial and economic crisis means that many EU countries are trying to rebalance their public finances: with such strong fiscal challenges to social policy, it is even more important to identify the impact of measures on vulnerable groups in society.

The purpose of the 2011 Peer Review seminar in Brussels

The studies cited above have identified many challenges or obstacles to effective social impact assessment (and Annexe A repeats the 10 key challenges identified by the PROGRESS-funded study of SIA in Member States).

An extremely important challenge is, clearly, a (lack of) political will or commitment to assess social impacts. But in order to develop the discussion that began in Bratislava, this seminar will focus on methodologies, tools and data sources needed to do quality ex ante social impact assessment. The PROGRESS-funded study of SIA in Member States found the following challenges:

- A tension between the quantitative ambitions and the qualitative reality. Impact assessment systems are often excessively quantitatively oriented: the pressure is high to quantify, otherwise there is a lack of visibility.
- A lack of appropriate tools, models and data sources to assess social impact quantitatively.
- Even where the analysis can only be based on qualitative methods: social impacts are often merely mentioned in passing.
- Social impact assessment is often performed by civil servants not used to dealing with social policy. There is often a lack of written guidance, training, and ad hoc support.
- Limited resources often do not allow civil servants to bring in external expertise.

¹¹ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st06/st06624-ad01.en11.pdf>

¹² See annex to <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/11/st10/st10405.en11.pdf>

- Non-existent or ineffective use of stakeholder consultation. Stakeholder consultation can be an effective quality control mechanism and it can be an important source of data and information.

It is these challenges that will be the focus of the November 2011 Peer Review seminar in Brussels. Rather than focusing on any one specific tool, the idea is to look at the range of methods, tools, and data sources available, and to discuss their use (both the possibilities and the limitations) with concrete examples presented by Peer Review participants.

To inform the seminar, Peer Review participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, and the answers to that have informed the rest of this discussion paper. Although not part of the topics to be discussed at the Peer Review, Section 3 briefly surveys the information provided by participants about the institutional and legal framework behind SIAs in Peer Review countries. Section 4 discusses methods, tools and data sources and other elements needed to build capacity in undertaking SIAs. Section 5 outlines other issues and themes raised by participants.

3. The process for undertaking social impact assessments

The 2010 study on social impact assessment in the Member States showed that Member States have been increasingly developing - often integrated - ex ante impact assessment systems within their policy processes. However, the extent to which these are assessing social impacts is not very promising. The study concludes:

‘Social IA is still in its infancy in most systems. Where it takes place at all the assessment of social impacts is often less well developed than the assessment of the budgetary, economic impact. Examples of IAs that contain an in depth analysis of social impacts are few and far between; where they do exist, they are most often conducted on policies with specific social objectives. [...] Nonetheless, this study has found that effective social IA is possible. There are pockets and / or isolated examples of good practice [...].’

It found that SIA is carried out in two main ways (although sometimes both approaches are combined):

- as one of the dimensions of integrated IA (usually next to economic and environmental impacts)
- in the form of specific impact tests that focus on one specific kind of social impact (such as equality, poverty, gender etc...).

Questionnaire responses from Peer Review participants suggest that practice still varies considerably across (and within) Member States. For example, some countries have requirements that social impact assessments (perhaps integrated into a wider impact assessment) accompany major statements of policy or legislative proposals. For example, Austria has had a requirement that integrated impact assessments accompany legislation since 2001; the relevant legislation is currently being revised, and a new and very precise impact assessment system will come into force from 2013. In Belgium, sustainability impact assessments are required for government decisions which are submitted to the Council of Ministers, and, Regulatory Impact Assessments are similarly required in Flanders (one of the regions of Belgium). In France, ex ante assessment has had to accompany every law proposed by the

French government and members of Parliament, and this is supposed to cover, inter alia, an assessment of its economic, financial, social and environmental consequences. Norway (not a Member State) requires some Social Impact Assessments as part of “consequence assessments” which accompany official studies, regulations, proportions and reports to the Norwegian Parliament. Spain has a relatively new central administrative body known as the National Agency of Evaluation of Public Policy and Service Quality; among its goals are to improve knowledge about the effects of public plans and programmes, and to increase transparency and accountability in the management of public resources. It has also produced specific evaluation reports.

In Finland, different government departments have their own approaches (and, in some cases, their own requirements) to conducting impact assessments. Health and Social Impact Assessments are also required of municipal authorities in some cases. In Ireland, discrete ‘impact assessments’ are carried out for official government policies, such as memoranda for government, statements of strategy, Estimates and annual Budget, the National Development Plan, EU plans and programmes, and legislation, but are done separately on various issues, such as poverty, gender, rural, employment and disability.

At the other extreme, Cyprus, Luxembourg and Greece have no requirement for any form of impact assessments (other than those which accompany ESF projects in Cyprus or Greece.) It is worth noting that there were the three participants who drew particular attention to the limited availability of tools or resources to perform SIAs in practice.

As well as a formal requirement for ex ante assessments, France has a substantial National Fund to pay for randomised experiments (“Fonds d’expérimentations pour la jeunesse”) which was created after the evaluation of the rSa in 2009. This Fund has a budget of € 230m for the period 2009-2011. This can be considered as “ex-ante” assessment in the sense that it is similar to pilot programmes.

The view from a stakeholder (EAPN) was that SIAs are perceived more often as propaganda than as real assessment of the possible effects of different possible scenarios, due to the formal and closed character of such activities, which means there is little chance SIAs will help prevent the development of potentially negative policy proposals. Perhaps among the reasons for this state of affairs are:

- the lack of universally-recognised social standards (in contrast to environmental ones);
- the reduced profile of social sciences compared with natural sciences;
- the close, and possibly conflicting, links of SIA with the decision-taking process.

EAPN would like SIAs to have an adequate organisational design, linked with requirements for transparency, embedded in a common framework with ex post social impact assessments and should follow clear procedural rules for consultations, participation and monitoring.

Questions arising from this include the following:

- what are the advantages and disadvantages of simplified impact assessments (as are proposed in Austria, and as exist in Belgium)? Do such simplified SIAs make it easier to explain to policy-makers what are social impacts? Or do they make it less likely that in-depth SIAs will be undertaken?

- is it essential to have a legal requirement to undertake SIAs in order make policy-makers consider social impacts throughout the decision-making process (which we assume is the ultimate aim)?
- is it easier for civil servants to argue for money to be devoted to SIAs, and on developing tools and resources in particular, when there is a high-profile legal commitment to undertake SIAs?

4. Methods, tools and data sources

The questionnaire invited Peer Review participants to suggest strengths and weaknesses of SIA in their own countries, and to put forward case studies from their countries which represented good or bad examples of social impact assessments.

Participants were encouraged to consider putting forward case studies which used a range of methods and tools (such as causal chain analysis, micro simulation, model families analysis, social experimentation, stakeholder consultation, and analysis of administrative data, survey data or qualitative data). However, the clear majority of the case studies put forward by participants involved the use of *microsimulation methods and/or quantitative analyse of administrative data or micro-data on household incomes*.

The methods and tools used in the Case Studies include the following.

Standard static microsimulation models combined with large-scale representative household surveys have been used to analyse changes to cash benefits or social welfare programmes (Belgium, Ireland, Spain) and the impact of indirect tax changes on household budgets (Cyprus, Ireland). Microsimulation models have been combined with behavioural models to examine reforms intended to encourage people to take up paid work (Belgium). Dynamic microsimulation models have been used to assess the financial sustainability and adequacy of current policy towards pension policy (Belgium, France), and to model the future demand and supply of doctors (France).

Administrative data has been used to analyse changes to programmes providing cash benefits (Cyprus, Belgium). In some cases administrative data has had survey income components added to it (Belgium) or been matched in some way to EU-SILC (Cyprus).

Model family analysis has been used to analyse changes affecting a large number of households in a small geographical area (Ireland).

France gave two examples of ex post evaluations based on random assignment; no other country made explicit reference to policies being evaluated by random assignment, but there were examples of policies being piloted without random assignment (Belgium).

One example was given where a bespoke surveys was used (Belgium). Qualitative research has been used in various instances (Belgium, Ireland, Spain). And consultation with stakeholders was mentioned as a tool by a few countries (Ireland, Spain).

Participants commented on the extent to which public administrations rely on outside organisations to perform SIAs, and, as could have expected, there was considerably variation.

For example, in Austria, it is hoped that the new requirement to produce SIAs will mean that public administrators will acquire all the skills needed to perform SIAs. Finland, likewise, seems hardly to use external contractors for ex ante SIAs, but this is seen by participants as an undesirable outcome. On the other hand, Spain and Ireland seem to rely considerably on external contractors for ex ante SIAs; this was seen as an undesirable outcome by the participants from Spain, but viewed more pragmatically in Ireland. In France, most ex ante impact assessments were done within public administrations, but the ex post evaluation of randomised experiments was typically contracted out to external researchers. In Greece, ex post programme and policy evaluation is usually outsourced to private consultancies; academic institutions and research centres are rarely involved, but individual academics or researchers may join a specific evaluation team on contract to a private consultancy.

Participants were particularly encouraged to suggest two types of ex ante SIAs: those of austerity packages or budgetary consolidation measures (ie responses to the current economic and fiscal crisis), and those of measures decided in the context of a target-setting process, such as the social inclusion/protection target for 2020 and the associated National Reform Programmes. In fact, few examples of these were suggested (although that does not mean that such SIAs do not exist: participants were not asked to be exhaustive when supplying examples).

The example put forward of an SIA of budgetary consolidation measures was by Ireland, where there is a requirement to perform a poverty impact assessment of the annual Budget, and this is typically centred on analysis produced by a microsimulation model which assesses the likely impact of the changes to taxes and welfare payments on the distribution of income and the at-risk-of-poverty rate.¹³ However, there is a considerable amount of work going on that is attempting to understand the social impact of the crisis and/or austerity measures. Most of this, though, is taking place in academic institutions with no direct link to policy-makers or formal SIAs. For example, academic studies exist of the impact of the crisis on the distribution of income in Greece¹⁴ and in the UK¹⁵, and a project is currently being finalised which compares the impact of austerity measures in six EU countries¹⁶. A parallel project, commissioned by the FRDB, is assessing the short- and long-run impact of the crisis on the income distribution and welfare of both individual and households in several OECD countries.¹⁷

Belgium put forward an example where analysts were attempting to use microsimulation tools to forecast the at-risk-of-poverty rate through to 2020, in the context of Belgium's National Reform Programme. A working group was asked to produce different policy scenarios: a "constant policy" scenario, and scenarios with new measures. Analysts attempted to use a microsimulation model linked to various administrative data-sets to produce these forecasts, but they found that "statistical capacity, in particular to simulate the distributional impact of policy reform on the medium and long term, was not available to answer these policy questions".¹⁸ One of my own

¹³ The published SIA is available at

<http://www.welfare.ie/EN/Topics/Budget/Bud11/Documents/PovertyAnalysisBudget11.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/euromod/em3-11>

¹⁵ See, for example, <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/5542> and <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/5369> for a view from independent researchers (both of which also assess the impact on regions and nations within the UK), and see http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/2011budget_annexa.pdf for analysis produced by the UK government.

¹⁶ Preliminary results are at: <http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/files/euromod/research-workshop-2011/Presentation3.pdf>. There will be a presentation of these results at the Peer Review meeting.

¹⁷ Preliminary results can be found at <http://www.frdb.org/language/eng/topic/highlights/scheda/conference-incomes-across-great-recession#>

¹⁸ The questionnaire response does not make clear whether this was due to the difficulties posed in using current data to forecast the at-risk-of-poverty rate, or to those posed by using a dataset built from administrative data sources to measure the at-risk-of-poverty rate.

pieces of work, though, does attempt to forecast the at-risk-of-poverty rate in the UK through to 2020, using a microsimulation model and static aging techniques, and isolating the additional impact on poverty of the government's austerity measures.¹⁹

Questions which arise from include the following:

- Static microsimulation models can be extremely powerful tools for ex ante SIAs. Ultimately, though, they are simple calculators, rather than models of individual behaviour. What are the strengths and weaknesses of static microsimulation models (such as Euromod, or country-equivalents)? What barriers are there to greater use of microsimulation models?
- Which models and data are available to support policy development and monitoring in the context of the Europe 2020 targets? What is needed? Are different definitions of poverty required for poverty impact assessments to become standard?
- Administrative data (or data warehouses) is usually available at little cost, and can offer a powerful resource. What are the strengths and limitations of using administrative data in ex ante SIAs? Are their privacy or data protection concerns that preclude outside organisations from accessing such data?
- What are good ways to undertake SIAs which involve small groups of the population, or groups which do not feature in typical household surveys? Can administrative data help, or is this where qualitative research is needed?
- What are useful ways to involve stakeholders in ex ante SIAs? What are the barriers to doing so?
- Government officials find it difficult to engage with the beneficiaries or recipients of policies, and their engagement is often mediated by representative organisations and elected officials. The potential of new technologies to facilitate stakeholder engagement could be usefully explored. How can we carry out a participatory evaluation in a context of fiscal consolidation?
- Randomised control trials and other pilots: are they worth it? And how do we convince policy-makers and the public to accept them?
- To what extent is size (of administration or of country/region) a barrier to undertaking SIAs?
- Static microsimulation models can be expensive to build and maintain, and complicated to use. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having the expertise located inside public administrations compared to outside?
- In general terms, there are a number of ways of actively involving external expertise, from ad hoc consultancy to the establishment of "research centres". What are the advantages and disadvantages of these methods, and of using external expertise at all?
- Does it help to have a central, focal organisation, such as Spain's National Agency of Evaluation of Public Policy and Service Quality, to increase awareness of SIA in general, and promote the skills and tools needed in particular?

¹⁹ <http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/5711>. There will be a presentation of these results at the Peer Review meeting.

5. Other issues concerning SIAs: stimulating demand, investing in supply, communicating results, and assessing the impact of impact assessments

Participants raised other issues that they would like to discuss. Responses not covered already include the following:

- Can good practice examples be identified of structures and processes that are aimed at systematically identifying unmet SIA needs and building up capacity in the long run (so that policy questions can be answered in the future)?²⁰
- What are good and bad experiences in communicating SIA and its results to policy makers?
- How could the EU support further methodological developments for ex ante SIA? Learning networks are an option here: what would be needed to support them?²¹
- How can we improve the capacity to undertake SIAs (and the political demand for their results) in countries where an evaluation culture does not yet exist?

Finally, participants were asked if there was any evidence that SIAs had affected (or, better, improved) the policy-making process. In Finland, a research institute under the Ministry of Justice (OPTULA) had examined the extent to which government departments were fulfilling their obligations to perform impact assessments. In Ireland, similar work had confirmed that government departments were fulfilling the letter of their obligation to do poverty impact assessments, but there was some scepticism that there had been any marked changes to the policy-making process. Where ex ante SIAs were based on pilots, it was often the case in Spain that decisions to roll-out pilots were made before the pilots had been evaluated. This leads to the question:

- Is it ever possible to say whether SIAs have affected the policy-making process?

²⁰ Participants were asked to say to what extent there was a long-term strategy aimed at building capacity. Other than investing in tools, no participant produced convincing evidence of a long-term strategy.

²¹ EAPN reported that it was actively engaged in building the capacity of its members and people experiencing poverty both at national and EU level. EAPN Ireland has put much effort into transferring the earlier experience with “poverty proofing” to different EAPN networks. EAPN Norway was involved in capacity building activities towards its members, civil servants and politicians, and EAPN Bulgaria, supported by UNDESA, has provided courses on SIA for local authorities, civil servants at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and NGOs. But these are essentially ad hoc activities and/or unsustainable projects that stop when the particular project (and its funding) come to an end.

Annex A. Ten challenges for social impact assessment

From: The Evaluation Partnership – CEPS, “Study on Social Impact Assessment as a tool for mainstreaming social inclusion and social protection concerns in public policy in the EU Member States. Executive Summary”. June 2010: p. 2.

<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=nl&catId=750&newsId=935&furtherNews=yes>

1. Acceptance of IA and buy-in: where the prevalent policy-making culture does not see IA as a tool and process that adds value, it can easily turn into a tick-box exercise.
2. IA process and timing: for IA to fully play its intended role, it needs to start early enough and be understood as a process (not just a report) that runs alongside and informs the entire policy development process.
3. Commitment to consider social impacts: even where social impacts are in principle included within the scope of IA, and the guidance places equal weight on the different pillars, de facto there is often a focus on economic impacts.
4. Definition of social impacts: the term “social impacts” is potentially so broad that it means little to non-specialists. Some form of orientation is needed to guide IA producers towards considering relevant social impacts.
5. The proportionate level of analysis: while it is generally accepted that the depth and scope of the analysis should be proportionate to the significance of the likely impact, defining criteria and mechanisms to operationalise this principle tends to be difficult.
6. Analytical methods, tools and data source: the lack of appropriate tools, models or data sources to assess social impacts quantitatively means that most social IA remains purely qualitative, and often very superficial.
7. Capacity and expertise: in order to ensure that civil servants who do not regularly deal with social policy have the necessary knowledge to conduct social IA, written guidance needs to be complemented by other methods, such as training and ad hoc support.
8. Stakeholder consultation: when channelled and processed appropriately, input and feedback from stakeholders represents an effective quality control mechanism and an important source of data and information for the analysis of (social) impacts.
9. IA as an aid to political decision-making: one of the main objectives of IA is to inform the political decision-making process, mainly in the legislative branch of government. However, the actual use of IAs by politicians as an aid to their decision-making is currently quite limited.
10. Quality control and system oversight: effective (internal or external) quality control mechanisms are crucial to ensuring IA quality. The social dimension is not often represented in central quality control / oversight for integrated IA systems.