

ISEA/ISEE

Vancouver 11-15 Canada

Title

Health Impact Assessment as part of Strategic Environmental Assessment: moving the European policy framework towards a greater integration of health consideration in the development of policies, plans and programs.

Authors

Carlos Dora, Francesca Racioppi – WHO

ABSTRACT

Although health is a formal component of environmental assessments (as stated in the European Directives and Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment), it is usually not addressed adequately. Health is neither well integrated within criteria for investigating the impacts on health nor is health expertise advocated during appraisals. In addition, when health-related aspects are addressed, they reflect a narrow interpretation of the meaning of "health". As a result, even when health aspects are addressed, assessments tend to estimate only the negative effects resulting from expected changes in environmental media, neglecting the effects of modifications on other health determinants, such as socio-economic ones, and the possibility of promoting health benefits.

At the Third Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health (1999), countries of the WHO European Region agreed to carry out environmental impact assessments fully covering impacts on human health and safety and to introduce strategic assessments of the environment and health impacts of proposed policies, plans, programs and general rules. In addition, the Treaty of Amsterdam of the European Community (Article 152) calls for "a high level of human health protection ...in the definition and implementation of all community policies and activities "and urges that "public health ...be "a consideration in policies of non-health sectors ".

The negotiation of a Protocol for Strategic Environmental assessment (SEA) within the framework of the Convention on Environment Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention) represents an important opportunity for developing a legal basis to ensure that potential health effects are fully taken into account when strategic decisions are taken, and that health professionals and health authorities are involved in the assessment process. The negotiation of the protocol breaks new ground under three different aspects. 1. It establishes a strengthened policy framework for integrating health aspects in environmental impact assessment. 2. It provides an opportunity for the health sector to influence developments in other sectors, and improve people 's health and well-being. 3. It contributes to develop institutional mechanisms and practices for integrated decision-making processes.

The WHO is taking an active part in this process, by stimulating and facilitating the participation of representatives of ministries of health in the negotiation process; developing guidelines (general, and specific to relevant sectors of the economy) on how to undertake HIA in SEA; promoting capacity building activities for HIA; widening networks for the exchange of information, knowledge and experience relating to HIA.

Topic

Health impact assessment