

NEWSLETTER

EU Twinning project at the Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia

A quarterly newsletter published by the RTA office of the EU-financed twinning project (2022-2024)
“Support in Implementation of Health Impact Assessment Practice in Georgia” Newsletter #2 December 2022

The twinning project has had a very productive, somewhat challenging past 2 quarters (second and the third). Within the project framework, quite intensive mission weeks have continued with fruitful cooperation with its internal and external partners. The twinning project consists of four major components:

- Approximating Georgian legislation to EU directives in environmental health and standards of EU Member States in carrying out Health Impact Assessment
- Strengthening technical and administrative capacities for implementation of HIA
- Building partnerships between public institutions and improving data value chain for HIA
- Improving public participation and communication of HIA

Progress on the different components is detailed below

Component 1: Approximating Georgian legislation to EU directives in environmental health and standards of EU Member States in carrying out Health Impact Assessment

The twinning project compares environmental health provisions within the Georgian legislation and the different regulations inside the EU and Association Agreement, as well as international conventions of which Georgia is a signatory.

Finnish and French legal experts have closely cooperated with the Georgian colleagues and made recommendations to improve health consideration in Strategic Environmental Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment. Together with the NCDC, they have developed an inventory of legislative acts directly or indirectly linked with environmental health and the provisions of the AA. In the future and in collaboration with the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, special focus is expected on improvement of legislative acts for risk assessment and risk management according to EU legislation on water, air, chemicals, noise and radiation.

Component 2: Strengthening technical and administrative capacities of the NCDC to carry out HIA

Capacity-building activities are conducted in order to strengthen the NCDC in quality control of SEA and in making recommendations to planning authorities on how to mitigate health negative impacts and maximize positive ones. Since May, experts have identified the main training needs for the NCDC and its partners resulting in a training plan with the French School of Public Health to roll-out in 2023 till the end of the project.



Workshop on Lebarde resort and Zugdidi Master plan

In this framework, two workshops were held on September 14th and 15th on “Identifying Lessons learned from Health in Strategic Environmental Assessments : Lebarde Resort Plan and Zugdidi Master Plan”. The active involvement of the NCDC, the National Environmental Agency, urban and architecture agencies and consulting companies involved in SEA has been valuable in this process. Participants recommended carrying-out similar workshops to gain experience and strengthen the network of practitioners. The key take-aways of the workshops were the following:

- The conclusions of the NCDC on strategic documents and SEA improve the quality of the initial plans through operationable recommendations,
- guidelines for HIA practitioners with tools for SEA quality control, monitoring and on different health determinants would be useful to improve the practice;
- Transparency, public participation and communication increase the credibility of the plans and the decision-making. Participation improves the initial plan, the support to the plan and eventually its monitoring. Stakeholders-mapping - of those impacted and the vulnerable population - and use of

relevant engagement tools make a difference in the elaboration of the plan and its SEA.



“Acting for healthy cities: a guide for health authorities and planning authorities. The guide is used in France by health authorities as a quality control tool for EIA and SEA reports, it contains tools and fiches according to health determinants like climate change, air quality, noise, and waste, ...”

Component 3: Building partnerships between the public institutions and Improving data value chain for HIA

The twinning project has conducted the expert's missions where the experts were able to meet with different partners and discuss the scope of work. Engagement and participation of partner institutions like Geostat, the NEA and the National Food Agency will allow for sounder, broader and more reliable data for HIA.

Focusing on air quality, Dr. Alain Le Tertre, biostatistician and environmental health epidemiologist at Santé Publique France, facilitated different workshops to introduce the free software AirQ+¹ to NCDC, NEA and Geostat, with experiences of its different uses in France. Backed by strong evidence and epidemiological studies, AirQ+ has been developed by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe to carry out quantitative health impact assessments of air pollution, such as estimating the mortality or morbidity attributed to specific emissions on a given territory. The tool will be useful for Georgian partners to carry different types of evidence-based impact assessments for decision-making and to guide policy choices.

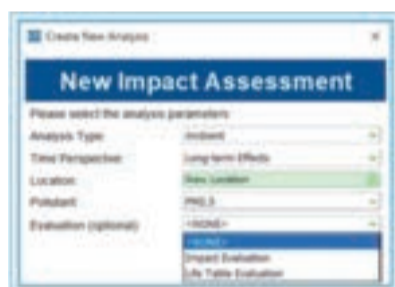
¹ <https://www.who.int/europe/tools-and-toolkits/airq---software-tool-for-health-risk-assessment-of-air-pollutio>
(available in English, French, German and Russian languages)

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If easy to use thanks to a user-friendly interface and guides, the challenges lie in getting quality and matching data on pollutant emissions, health endpoints and demographics. In November, the project carried out a hands-on training for the NCDC and NEA staff using test data. Further work with the NCDC, NEA and Geostat continues to check and improve the data in order to start using AirQ+ on sound, official and quality data from Georgian institutions in 2023.



“For instance, AirQ+ allows to estimate the impact of PM2.5 emissions on total mortality of a territory”

Component 4: Improving public participation and communication around HIA

HIA relies on transparency and democracy. Georgian, French and Finnish public health specialists developed a strategy, which aims at enhancing communication of and public participation in Health Impact Assessment. The strategy is based on different interviews, a questionnaire to HIA practitioners and environmental NGOs and based on the strong experience of the NCDC in carrying out public health campaigns (like Tobacco control). Colleagues from the partner countries designed an action plan to start implementing the strategy in 2023, focusing on information content, NCDC website improvement, collaboration with partners and awareness-raising.

On November 14th, environmental health and health promotion specialists

of the NCDC, Philippe Damie from a Regional Health Agency in France and Marko Lähteenmäki, Communications Manager at THL, were able to attend the public hearing in Tskaltubo on the development plan for the central part of the municipality and its related SEA. Ms. Dali Kekelidze, public health specialist at the Environmental Health Department of the NCDC and case manager, attended the public hearing. “As a public health specialist working on environmental health issues, it was essential to participate in a field trip to the impacted area and to participate in the general discussion of the Tskaltubo development plan because public hearings are mandatory and encourage the involvement of stakeholder groups, such as local people, project beneficiaries, NGOs, experts, etc to voice their concerns and suggestions. It provides better comprehensiveness and effectiveness. It leads to more informed choices and better environmental outcomes for the plan. Also, the population is more interested and informed about the risk-factors that environmental pollutants can have on human health.”



Public hearing on Tskaltubo central part development plan

Dali Kekelidze has been actively involved with the French and Finnish colleagues on the case, especially regarding water-related issues. Field visit and participation in the public hearing of the twinning team was a concrete opportunity to share experiences and tools as well as improve the recommendations of the NCDC to the sustainable and healthy development of the town. Main recommendations are the following: the extension of the sanitary protection zone to the entire Central Park would enable to protect the green space, the thermal and water resources and would enhance the quality of life and physical activity of residents, patients and tourists. Furthermore, expertise and studies on

hydrology and thermal waters of Tskaltubo territory are required to ensure the protection of the resources if the retention basin in the South of the Central Park and the water amusement park are approved. The future projects of the strategic plan (agricultural project, shopping center and parking lot, amusement park and public transport project) should include detailed impacts and mitigation measures on water resources, at the heart of the city's history and development.

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