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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 #3 March 2023

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
- Building technical and administrative capacities of NCDC for implementation of HIA in Georgia
- Building partnerships between Georgian institutions and improving data value chain for HIA
- Improving public participation, involving civil society, and disseminating results in HIA

Component 1: Improving Georgian Public Health legal and regulatory framework revised in line with the provisions of the relevant Annexes of the Association Agreement related to the environmental health

The European Commission has released the analytical report on the implementation of the EU acquis in Georgia in early February 2023, stating that Georgia is at an early stage of preparation in the field of environment and climate change legislation. Implementation and enforcement represent a challenge. Regarding the horizontal issue of environmental assessment, it reminded that “Georgia implemented the Aarhus Convention including provisions on access to environmental information. It implemented some of the Aarhus transparency rights and on access to justice. Georgia adopted a framework legislation on environmental assessments but main principles need to be effectively implemented.” The twinning project has identified monitoring part of EA as the strengthening of health in environmental assessment as main works to improve the current legislation.




Regarding sectoral legislation (air, water, noise, ...), twinning activities related to approximation of Georgian legislation to EU standards continue with a focus on health risks assessment and management related to air quality and electromagnetic fields in the very near future. Gaps in the Georgian legislation

in comparison with the Association Agreement and the EU acquis is underway, and recommendations for improvement of the current one. For air quality for instance, alert and information thresholds are foreseen in the EU Clean Air Directive which Georgia transposed into the national legislation according to the requirements of the AA. Regarding alert thresholds and information and recommendations thresholds, France has transposed the dispositions for nitrogen dioxide and ozone but also went further in determining those thresholds for fine particulate matters. Local and health authorities are actively releasing specific messages to the general population and vulnerable groups (mothers and newborns, elderly, people exposed...) to limit their exposure. Furthermore when alert thresholds of pollution are reached within a defined zone, authorities can take specific measures to reduce emissions, such as restriction on usage of wood-burning stoves, reduction of speed for traffic, circulation of 50% of the fleet only (car plates ending in an even number for instance), promotion of public transport (reduction or free for the duration of the pollution episode), ...

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

Colleagues from France and Finland are working with the NCDC to start the work on organizational development for HIA within NCDC: internal processes and administration, reporting about HIA, budgeting for HIA related activities. The exercise will give scenarios for the creation of a HIA unit inside the NCDC, maximizing internal expertise on different topics (like medical statistics, epidemiology, health promotion, ...) and use of outside expertise (specialized agencies, external expertise, ...).

The training plan elaborated by the French School of Public Health was validated during the last steering committee and the training activities for the NCDC and partners will start in May 2023. The first module will focus on the guidelines for health in environmental assessment, with use of tools along the environmental assessment process and Georgian cases of SEA as well as field visits to sectorial projects (waste plants, land-use plans, ...). Colleagues from France and Finland presented a draft content of guidelines for health environmental assessment and HIA based on the already impressive work of UNECE for the SEA/EIA guidelines in Georgia since 2016 as well as on the recent works in France and other Member States. The elaboration and testing of the tools with NCDC and partners is also part of the training. Colleagues

emphasize the work on operational tools at the different stages of the environmental assessment, and with specific horizontal issues to address :  governance with the planning authority and other relevant authorities,  gathering expertise and data;  active communication and public participation.



Example of the implementation of the tool for public participation and health diagnosis in the city of Serris (France) at an early stage of the elaboration of the new master plan of a district : a community walk through the project/plan territory including the planning authority, a public health specialist and the local population with a guided checklist

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

Twinning colleagues have elaborated the draft strategy for data required in health impact assessment: what data is useful to find along the process and to be presented in the EA report (baseline, construction phase, impacts of the plan) and where to find it when it is available in Georgia, what to do when data is not available and collection opportunities. Based on international guidelines colleagues have identified the main data for health outcomes and public health indicators for the health diagnosis as well as environmental risk factors for air quality, water resources, environmental noise, climate change, waste, soil and electromagnetic fields. It is significant to mention that since February 2023, the localization and accessibility of data has improved at Geostat, with a set of socio-economic and demographic data available at municipal level.

The environmental data has to be of a certain quality and validity to be used for quantitative evidence-based risk and impact assessments for determinants where science has proved the causal relationship between exposure (for instance to PM2.5) and health outcome (mortality). For example, to quantify the health impact of PM2.5 on mortality using AirQ+ on a

¹ The Georgian legislation foresees alert thresholds for NO₂, SO₂ and O₃ and an information threshold for ozone are established for the protection of the general population and sensitive sections of the population from brief exposure

² For PM₁₀, the alert threshold is 80 µg/m³ for 24h

³ WHO Environmental Health Indicator ; Healthy Cities indicators ; Urbanisme favorable à la santé



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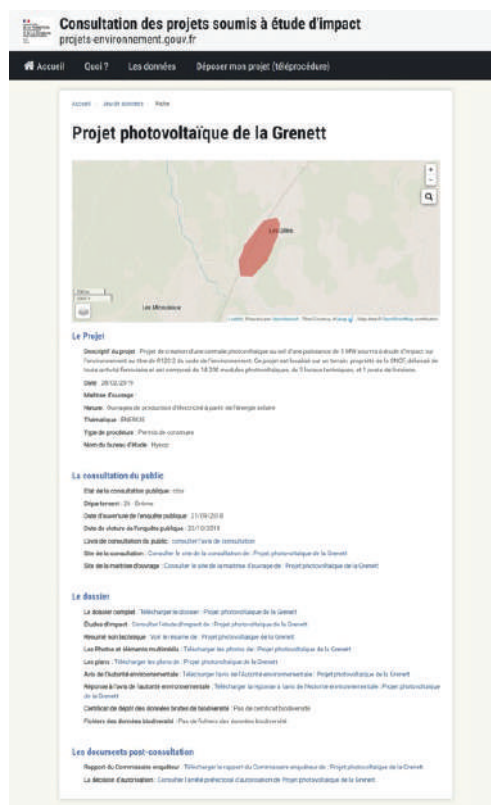
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given territory, the best practice is to have 3 years of validated data from the air quality monitoring station (to smooth potential environmental and health yearly variations) and of quality (the mean concentration value must be based on days with valid data, in each year, 75% of days with valid measurements should be available). This part will be part of a specific training at the EHESP in the second semester of 2023 focusing on quantitative risk assessments and environmental burden of disease (heatwaves, drinking water, noise ...).

Component 4: Improving public participation and communication

The communication strategy and its 2023 action plan have been translated to Georgian and validated during the last steering committee, allowing for a start of activities early in the year by Finnish colleagues Saana Ihamäki and Marko Lähteenmäki - both communication specialists at THL- focusing on website improvement, environmental health communication campaigns and tasks related to public participation and social media inside the NCDC. "We are very excited about developing the HIA related website at the same time as the NCDC website is undergoing big developments. Together with the experts from the NCDC and based on our Finnish practices and on the experiences from France, our aim is to maximize the usability of the site for both the general public and the HIA practitioners. As SEA is a multi-organisation effort involving planning, environmental and health authorities together for the same case, it is crucial to cooperate with the different participating actors and interlink the sites to ensure a uniform experience for the user. This would allow for better understanding of the process and for improved opportunities for public participation in the planning".

Different recommendations for the use of social media for dissemination and promotion of the HIA process, especially through marketing tools for the impacted territory, have also been identified and shared with the Environmental Health Department and Health Promotion Unit of the NCDC. Further work continues for the elaboration of terms of reference for supporting content for the website (video, infographics for stages of HIA and lay-out of the guidelines). The twinning will also organize two short-movie contests for residents in Georgia and civil society organization on the identified environmental health issues : the impact on health of heatwaves and air pollution and how to manage the risks.



In France, each project/plan subject to EIA/SEA is registered on webpage and follows the same content design and is interlinked with possible other websites linked with the project/plan: [Home – projets-environnement.gouv.fr](https://projets-environnement.gouv.fr)

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