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Consistent and Proportionate Consideration of Health in Strategic Environmental Assessment (Pro-Health SEA)

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What did the research aim to address?

This research project aimed to enable the EPA to develop a considered position with regard to addressing population and human health in strategic environmental assessment (SEA). This was achieved by undertaking a thorough review of current international practice and guidance, and by consulting international health and SEA experts. The Health in SEA Toolkit developed as part of this research identifies good practice case studies, formulates procedural and methodological recommendations to better consider population and human health in SEA, and provides the basis for developing “good practice guidance for addressing health in SEA”, a key commitment in the national SEA Action Plan 2021–2025.

The research outputs and recommendations support the assessment, mitigation and monitoring of potential health effects in SEA practice, as well as associated reporting, capacity building and regulatory activities of the EPA. The research has also generated evidence that is crucial in assisting Ireland to meet commitments under international, EU and national policies and strategies.

What did the research find?

The research confirmed that SEA provides an excellent opportunity to incorporate public health considerations into plan-making and determined that there are significant prospects for improving practice in this regard. In this context, the research identified good practice recommendations for the consistent and proportionate consideration of health in SEA. These include the adoption of clear definitions of health in SEA processes; the explicit identification of direct and indirect health effects and outcomes from environmental determinants in SEA environmental reports; due consideration of inequalities within populations, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups; the use of evidence-based indicators to monitor health change, appropriate to the relevant plan and SEA tier; and encouraging proactive participation of human health professionals and specialists at each stage of the SEA process as appropriate.

How can the research findings be used?

The project has contributed to delivering on the action to prepare “good practice guidance for addressing health in SEA” set out in the SEA Action Plan 2021–2025. The project outputs and recommendations will inform the preparation of this planned guidance and contribute to any future revisions of the national SEA guidelines and relevant EPA SEA guidance. They will also be incorporated into the EPA-funded national SEA capacity-building programme. It is anticipated that the toolkit developed will also support the work of the EPA SEA team and inform the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage’s (Environmental Assessment) EU and International Planning Regulation Unit, the Office of the Planning Regulator, and the National SEA Forum. The toolkit also provides information and guidance that may be applicable to other EU Member States and the wider impact assessment community.

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