



Recommendation of the Council on  
the Assessment of Projects, Plans  
and Programmes with Significant  
Impact on the Environment



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## Background Information

The Recommendation on the Assessment of Projects with Significant Impact on the Environment was adopted by the OECD Council on 8 May 1979 to encourage Adherents to use environmental assessment for individual projects (facilities and infrastructure). The Recommendation was revised by the Council on 14 November 2019 on the proposal of the Environment Policy Committee (EPOC). On this occasion, it was renamed "the Recommendation on the Assessment of Projects, Plans and Programmes with Significant Impact on the Environment".

The revisions aimed at expanding the scope of the Recommendation to cover public plans and programmes, strengthening the provisions on the application of the prevention principle to environmental assessment, and emphasising linkages with other OECD legal instruments.

More specifically, the revised Recommendation recommends environmental assessment as part of the planning, development and decision-making process for projects, plans and programmes and emphasises the need for consideration of reasonable alternatives, stakeholder's engagement and public participation, as well as follow-up on measures derived from the assessment. Lastly, it recommends environmental assessment in a transboundary context.

### ***One of the fundamental pillars of the OECD environmental acquis***

Environmental impact assessment (EIA) is a process of systematic analysis and evaluation of environmental impacts of a proposed activity, consultation with affected parties and due consideration of the results of this analysis and consultation in planning, authorising and implementing the activity. EIA is a cornerstone of environmental policies and EIA-related provisions are found in other OECD legal instruments, including those related to coastal zone management, energy, transport and tourism.

The Recommendation is based on the principles of prevention and participation. Prevention means that environmental assessment is undertaken prior to making key design choices and principal decisions authorising the proposed activity. One of the mechanisms of implementing the prevention principle is analysis of alternatives. The principle of participation reflects the fact that environmental assessment cannot be reduced to purely scientific analysis, but also involves finding socially acceptable solutions.

### ***The need for an enhanced standard on environmental assessment***

In the last four decades, the scope of environmental assessment has been expanded in OECD Member countries and beyond to include public plans and programmes. Governments have come to the conclusion that environmental issues should be taken into consideration not only in making decisions on specific activities but also in drawing up long-term development plans and programmes in a range of sectors such as land use, agriculture, energy, industry or transport. The goal of the 2019 revision of the Recommendation was to integrate environmental assessment of plans and programmes in line with the current practice.

The revision of the Recommendation benefited from extensive consultations over 18 months in EPOC, the Working Party on Environmental Performance (WPEP) and the Working Party on Integrating Environmental and Economic Policies (WPIEEP).

### ***Dissemination and implementation tools***

EPOC will share the Recommendation through its networks as well as during technical activities and events organised by the OECD. The monitoring of its implementation will be conducted in the framework of [Environmental Performance Reviews](#). Upon request and pending available funding, country-specific implementation guidance may also be provided.

For further information, please consult: <https://oe.cd/epr>.

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## Implementation

### ***2024 Report to Council***

A Report on the dissemination, implementation and continued relevance of the Recommendation was presented to Council in 2024. The 2024 Report concluded that most Adherents implement the Recommendation's provisions. However, some Adherents have important implementation gaps, particularly with respect to sectoral coverage of environmental assessment of projects, plans and programmes, consideration of alternatives, and public participation. Adherents also face considerable implementation challenges in implementing environmental assessment of plans and programmes. In line with the findings of the 2024 Report, these challenges need to be addressed through improvements in the national regulatory frameworks and implementation practices, particularly at the local level. Consistent recommendations of OECD Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs) with regard to environmental assessment would also promote better implementation of this legal instrument. In addition, better integration of the Recommendation's provisions in EPRs would improve its dissemination.

The 2024 Report concluded that the Recommendation continues to be relevant, particularly in areas where implementation gaps persist, and that no further revisions were necessary in the short-to-medium term. As the evolution of regulatory provisions and implementation practices on environmental assessment is slow, it proposed that the next report to Council on the dissemination, implementation and continued relevance of the Recommendation be prepared in ten years' time, in 2034.

## THE COUNCIL,

**HAVING REGARD** to Article 5 b) of the Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development of 14 December 1960;

**HAVING REGARD** to the Declaration on Environmental Policy [[OECD/LEGAL/0134](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council concerning the Reduction of Environmental Impacts from Energy Production and Use [[OECD/LEGAL/0149](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Noise Abatement Policies [[OECD/LEGAL/0163](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council for Strengthening International Co-operation on Environmental Protection in Frontier Regions [[OECD/LEGAL/0165](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Environment and Tourism [[OECD/LEGAL/0171](#)]; the Declaration on Anticipatory Environmental Policies [[OECD/LEGAL/0175](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Environmental Assessment of Development Assistance Projects and Programmes [[OECD/LEGAL/0227](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Integrated Coastal Zone Management [[OECD/LEGAL/0268](#)]; the Recommendation of the Council on Assessment and Decision-Making for Integrated Transport and Environment Policy [[OECD/LEGAL/0325](#)]; and the Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance [[OECD/LEGAL/0390](#)];

**CONSIDERING** that significant public and private development projects, during execution and subsequent operation, as well as implementation of plans and programmes may generate direct and indirect impact on the natural and man-made environment; that such impact may significantly reduce the potential short and long-term benefits expected from such projects, plans and programmes; and that in some cases irreversible environmental damage and loss of amenities may result;

**RECOGNISING** that the capability for forecasting, or dealing with environmental impacts of such projects, plans and programmes and for identifying and carrying out measures to mitigate such impacts continues to increase;

**RECOGNISING** that the use, where appropriate, of procedures for assessing environmental impact can improve decisions on projects, plans and programmes;

**RECOGNISING** that Members and non-Members having adhered to this Recommendation (hereafter "Adherents") have varying legislative, institutional and administrative frameworks within which the assessment of environmental and other impacts either takes place already or can be incorporated;

**CONSIDERING** that environmental assessment may be performed at all levels of government, according to Adherents' legal and institutional frameworks;

### On the proposal of the Environment Policy Committee:

I. **RECOMMENDS** that Adherents:

1. Use environmental assessment as part of the planning, development and decision-making process for projects, plans and programmes having potentially significant impact on the environment.
2. Establish clear scope and procedures for assessment of the environmental impacts and for determination of relevant mitigation measures as inputs to the planning and decision-making process in order to restore and enhance environmental quality.
3. Incorporate analysis of reasonable alternatives in the assessment of environmental impacts of projects, plans and programmes with a view to arriving at an informed decision that includes best environmental considerations.
4. Include practical and appropriate measures for consulting public authorities having functions and responsibilities relevant to the environmental impacts of projects, plans and programmes.
5. Implement, where appropriate, practical measures for informing the public and for participation by those who may be affected at suitable stages of decision-making on projects, plans and programmes.

6. Ensure that there are means of putting into effect measures derived from the environmental assessment of projects, plans and programmes.
7. Implement appropriate practical measures for monitoring the effects on the environment of projects, plans and programmes that have been subject to environmental assessment.
8. Institute, as appropriate, environmental assessment procedures for projects, plans and programmes that might have significant transboundary impacts.

**II. INVITES** the Secretary-General to disseminate this Recommendation.

**III. INVITES** Adherents to disseminate this Recommendation at all levels of government.

**IV. INVITES** non-Adherents to take due account of, and adhere to, this Recommendation.

**V. INSTRUCTS** the Environment Policy Committee to:

- a. Serve as a forum for Adherents to share experience in implementing various environmental assessment methods and procedures.
- b. Support the implementation of the Recommendation by Adherents through reviews or guidance.
- c. Monitor the implementation of this Recommendation and thereon to Council no later than five years following its adoption and at least every ten years thereafter.

## About the OECD

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## OECD Legal Instruments

Since the creation of the OECD in 1961, around 460 substantive legal instruments have been developed within its framework. These include OECD Acts (i.e. the Decisions and Recommendations adopted by the OECD Council in accordance with the OECD Convention) and other legal instruments developed within the OECD framework (e.g. Declarations, international agreements).

All substantive OECD legal instruments, whether in force or abrogated, are listed in the online Compendium of OECD Legal Instruments. They are presented in five categories:

- **Decisions** are adopted by Council and are legally binding on all Members except those which abstain at the time of adoption. They set out specific rights and obligations and may contain monitoring mechanisms.
- **Recommendations** are adopted by Council and are not legally binding. They represent a political commitment to the principles they contain and entail an expectation that Adherents will do their best to implement them.
- **Substantive Outcome Documents** are adopted by the individual listed Adherents rather than by an OECD body, as the outcome of a ministerial, high-level or other meeting within the framework of the Organisation. They usually set general principles or long-term goals and have a solemn character.
- **International Agreements** are negotiated and concluded within the framework of the Organisation. They are legally binding on the Parties.
- **Arrangement, Understanding and Others:** several other types of substantive legal instruments have been developed within the OECD framework over time, such as the Arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits, the International Understanding on Maritime Transport Principles and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendations.