How UNECE’s legal instruments and tools promote sustainable infrastructure

Session 2: Surveying the sustainable infrastructure landscape: existing tools, approaches, initiatives

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Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region

56 member States across Europe, North America and Asia.

Supporting countries to achieve the SDGs
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

Rapid urbanization

Urban Population in UNECE region (% of total)

Source: World Bank Statistics
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

Industrial safety threats - Europe

Population density

“Seveso” (hazardous industrial activities) sites, Europe
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues affecting the UNECE region

Industrial safety threats

Aluminium sludge spill in Kolontar, Hungary (2010)

Petrochemical plant in Jilin City, China (2005)

Cynaide spill from a gold mine, Baie Mare, Romania (2000)

Explosions and fire at oil depot, Buncefield, UK (2005)

Accidental spill, zinc mine in Ridder, Kazakhstan (2016)
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues beyond the UNECE region

*Industrial safety threats – beyond the UNECE region*

Brazil on 25 January 2019 when the Brumadinho dam failed at an iron ore mine in the South East of the country, killing over 65 persons with roughly 300 still missing.
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

Industrial accidents triggered by natural hazards (‘NATECH’)

Industrial and chemical hazard management important in light of climate change and extreme weather events that can trigger major accidents
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

The Belt and Road initiative: opportunities and risks for existing and planned infrastructure

- Meets infrastructure needs for transportation, communication, energy supply and industry
- Major opportunity to enhance connectivity and economic prosperity
- Boosts socio-economic & institutional development and regional cooperation

Potential irreversible environmental impacts:

- Contamination of water
- Air pollution and impact on climate
- Destruction and fragmentation of habitats, nature reserves and migratory paths
- Deforestation and Soil erosion

About 100 projects in Central Asia are directly or indirectly linked to the Belt and Road Initiative.
Belt and Road initiative
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

Infrastructure within and along transboundary waters

- 153 countries share rivers, lakes and aquifers.
- Transboundary basins cover more than 50% of Earth’s land surface, account for 60% of global freshwater flow and are home to more than 40% of the world’s population.
- **Infrastructure development in transboundary basins can be a source of friction**: dams, reservoirs, canals, diversions, irrigation systems, wastewater, industrial activities that pose a pollution risk etc.
Sustainable infrastructure: key issues in the UNECE region

**Air pollution**

- Decoupling of air pollutant emissions and economic growth
- Air pollutant emissions reduced considerably in western Europe achieved through investments in more sustainable infrastructure, e.g. technological solutions such as flue gas desulphurisation, low-sulphur fuels and catalytic converters in cars and energy efficiency improvements
- However, progress uneven in the UNECE region – need for implementation of Best Available Techniques in energy in EECCA

Figure 17. Determinants of reductions in sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions in western Europe (Rafaj et al., 2014).
How UNECE’s legal instruments, tools and guidance support sustainable infrastructure

▪ A platform for governments to discuss and advise on integrated policy development.

▪ Sets norms and standards and facilitates dialogue at the transboundary level about plans, development, impacts and monitoring
Housing and land management, industrial safety, environmental impact, and public participation


Jointly developed by UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention, Espoo Convention and Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment. Contributions by Committee on Housing and Land Management and Aarhus Convention.

A tool for countries to improve their planning, coordination and decision-making on land use plans and development proposals.

Part A – General guidance: synergies and interlinkages between UNECE legal instruments; countries’ good practice examples of their application.

Part B – Technical guidance: examples of land-use planning approaches and risk assessment methodologies; key steps to evaluate proposals.

Guidance on Tailings Management Facilities and other industry sectors

Guidance on TMFs helps to improve the safety of mining operations and prevent accidents like the dam failure in Brazil (January 2019).

Other guidance developed by UNECE Industrial Accidents Convention and Water Convention and the Joint Expert Group on Water and Industrial Accidents for a variety of industry sectors.
Work on the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus under the Water Convention since 2013

- Task Force on the Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus
- Capacity building and joint assessments with countries on resource management trade-offs and synergies
- Reconciling of different sectors’ development and environmental needs.
- Participatory assessments in 7 basins Balkans, Caucasus, Central Asia, northern Africa
- Assessment reports, policy briefs (Available at: http://www.unece.org/env/water/publications/pub.html)
- Follow up actions: e.g. Multi-stakeholder “Hard Talks” on Renewable Energy Investment, jointly with the GERE & governments
- Foreseen 2019-2021: a synthesis of solutions (including infrastructure), guidance for navigating the trade-offs and synergies in renewable energy
UNECE Espoo Convention and the Protocol on SEA = Key tools for sustainable infrastructure

- EIA: applied to projects
- SEA: applied to plans, policies / legislation, programmes
- Helps to avoid/reduce & monitor negative environmental & health impacts of planned strategies and projects
- Improve planning & project design
- Decision-making better-informed & more objective through stakeholder consultations
- Enhance governance – transparency, public participation
- Improve cross-boarder cooperation, help avoid tensions/conflicts
- **Guidelines, legislative advice, pilots and training help countries in reforming legislation and assessing the impacts of plans and projects** – important tools e.g. for Central Asian countries to green the BRI
- E.g. Guidelines on EIA in a Transboundary Context for Central Asian Countries
Air pollution

Task Force on Techno-Economic Issues, under the UNECE Air Convention

- Set emission limit values for air pollutants, proven to help stimulate investments in clean technologies and infrastructure, incl. in energy sector
- Task Force on Techno-Economic Issues on database of information on control technologies for air pollution abatement and their costs
- Capacity building activities on Best Available Techniques
  - Identifying technologies to reduce air pollution, through enhanced international cooperation
  - Making investments in clean technologies and sustainable infrastructure

→ http://tftei.citepa.org/en/clearing-house-home
Conclusion

UNECE’s conventions, tools and guidance are applicable for use in the region and globally.

Cross-sectoral policy integration and cooperation is crucial for the development of sustainable infrastructure.

Transboundary cooperation is also vital to address these regional and global challenges.
Thank you for your attention!

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https://www.unece.org/env/teia.html
Goal 9: Sustainable Cities and Communities
Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Target 9.1: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all