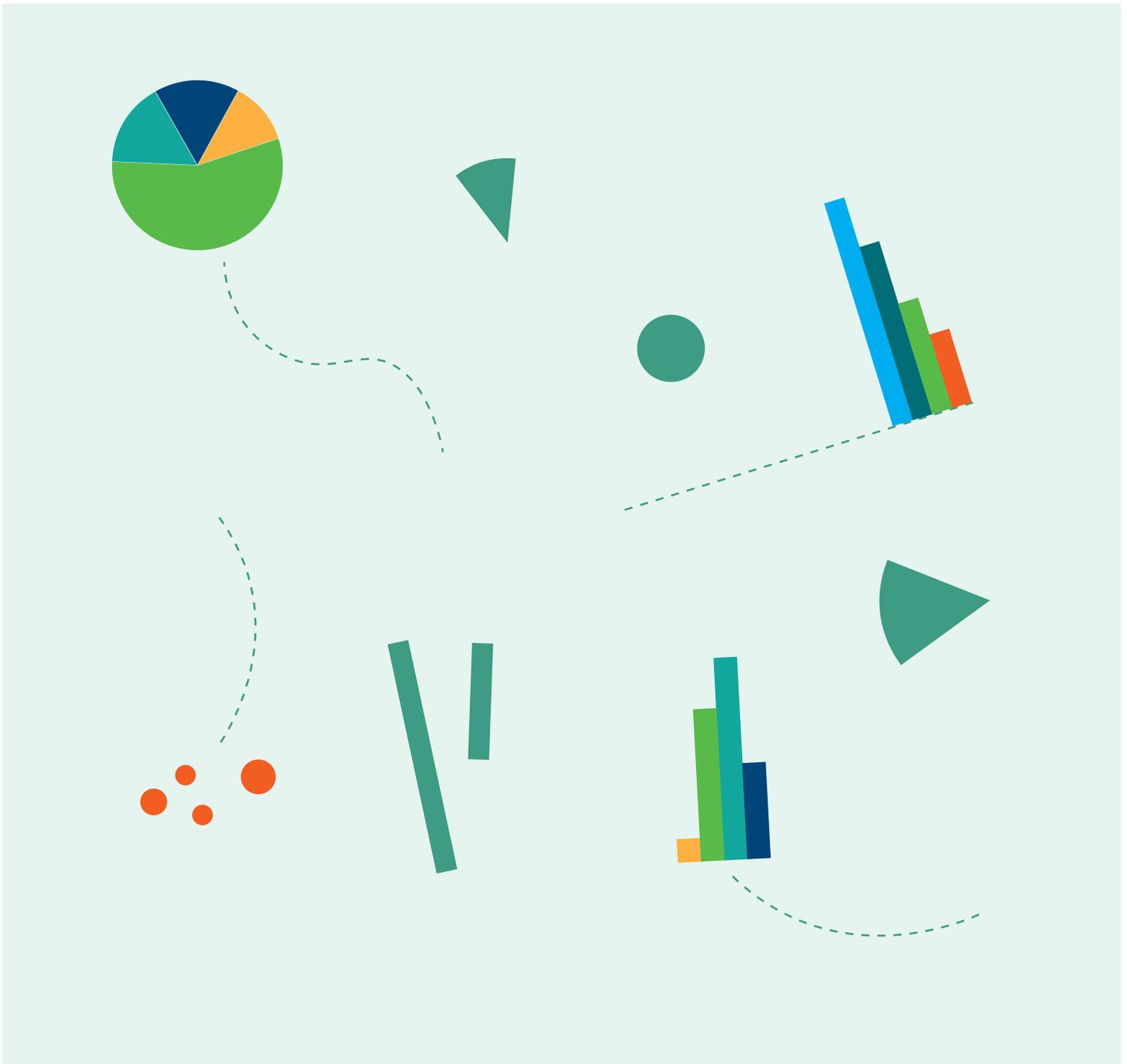


Effectiveness and relevance of recent environmental assessments for policy-making and public information in the Republic of Belarus

Working paper, October 2017



European Environment Agency



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European Environment Agency
Kongens Nytorv 6
1050 Copenhagen K
Denmark
Tel.: +45 33 36 71 00
Web: eea.europa.eu
Enquiries: eea.europa.eu/enquiries

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1 Introduction

This report synthesises the results of a survey among the users of environmental assessments in the Republic of Belarus (hereinafter Belarus). The direct objective of the study, which was funded by the EU within the project, “Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) principles and practices in the European neighbourhood regions (ENI SEIS II)”, was to better understand how users perceive the quality and usefulness of environmental assessments published in their countries. The end goal was to then identify how the countries’ capacities for regular environmental assessment and reporting could be further enhanced in order to better support their policy-making, public awareness and, in the end, environmental performance.

The study, designed and commissioned by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and carried out by Zoï Environment Network, was conducted through a series of interviews with the users of environmental assessments in each of the six countries. The interviews were based on a standardised questionnaire from the EEA to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of national assessments. The interviews and the initial analysis were carried out by Zoï field staff in Kyiv for Belarus. Attempts were also made to collect data about the dissemination and use of environmental assessments, both directly and through the available channels. The work was coordinated with and to the extent possible assisted by the national focal points for the ENI SEIS II project in Belarus.

The integrated and thematic environmental assessments used for review are described below.

[National state-of-the-environment report of the Republic of Belarus, 2010](#), in Russian. This 150-page document provides information about the state of the environment for 2005 – 2010. Specifically, it describes the status and trends in air, water, biodiversity, soil, waste, agriculture, transport, and radiation. The report also outlines policy priorities including environmental management, education, awareness and international cooperation. Conclusions are provided in some of the chapters and are also presented in a separate final chapter. The report has a large number of visuals.

[Fifth National Report of the Republic of Belarus to the Convention on Biological Diversity](#), 2014, in Russian. This 59-page document follows the structure provided by the

Convention. The report includes baseline information and trends, sections on monitoring, threats to biodiversity, national conservation objectives and measures, integration of conservation into sectoral policies, assessments of the effectiveness of previous measures, progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, and lessons learned through CBD implementation. Conclusions and recommendations are provided throughout the text as well as at the end of the report. The report is illustrated with graphs.

[Sixth National Communication of the Republic of Belarus to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), 2015, in Russian. This 306-page document was prepared according to the UNFCCC requirements. It contains a summary, baseline information about the country, the national GHG inventory, mitigation policies and measures and their possible effects, assessments of vulnerability and adaptation, information on financial resources and technology transfer, research, education, and additional information in the annexes. The report is richly illustrated.

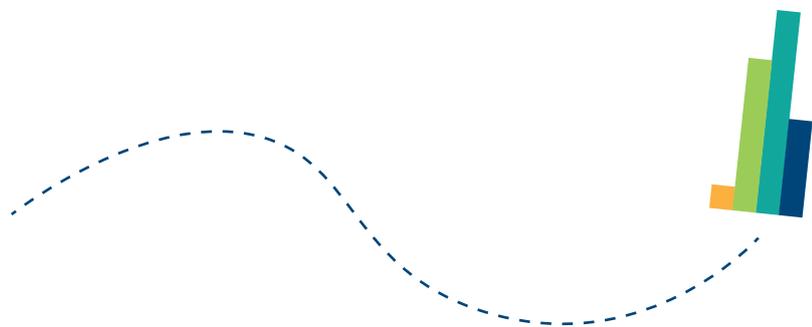
The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (MNREP) is responsible for the preparation of these reports. State-of-the-environment reports are produced every five years, and the latest report should have been produced in 2015. Many respondents suggested increasing the reporting frequency to be able to get up-to-date information more often. The 2010 state-of-the-environment report was prepared by MNREP and the Institute for Nature Use of the National Academy of Sciences. The report to CBD was developed by MNREP and the Research and Implementation Centre on Bio-resources of the National Academy of Sciences. The Sixth National Communication to UNFCCC was prepared with GEF financial support by MNREP assisted by the Belarusian Research Centre “Ecology” and the Aarhus centre in Minsk.

The standardised list of intended respondents for conducting the interviews included policy-makers from the environmental as well as non-environmental sectors of the government, selected representatives of research, academia and business as well as civil society (Annex 1).

In Belarus, invitations for an interview were sent to 26 organizations / potential respondents. Some organizations

declined an invitation due to the need for formal approval (complicated by the lack of official registration of the ENI SEIS II project in Belarus at the time of the survey). Others declined because they have never used the reports in their daily work or because of the absence of competent personnel. Others simply never responded to the invitation.

Overall, representatives of 13 organizations were interviewed and completed the questionnaire. Some respondents provided an integrated evaluation of all three assessments, and others separately evaluated some or all.



2 Findings and key messages

This chapter analyses the cumulative responses for all the reviewed assessments. Annex 2 presents more detailed data.

Effectiveness

Key messages

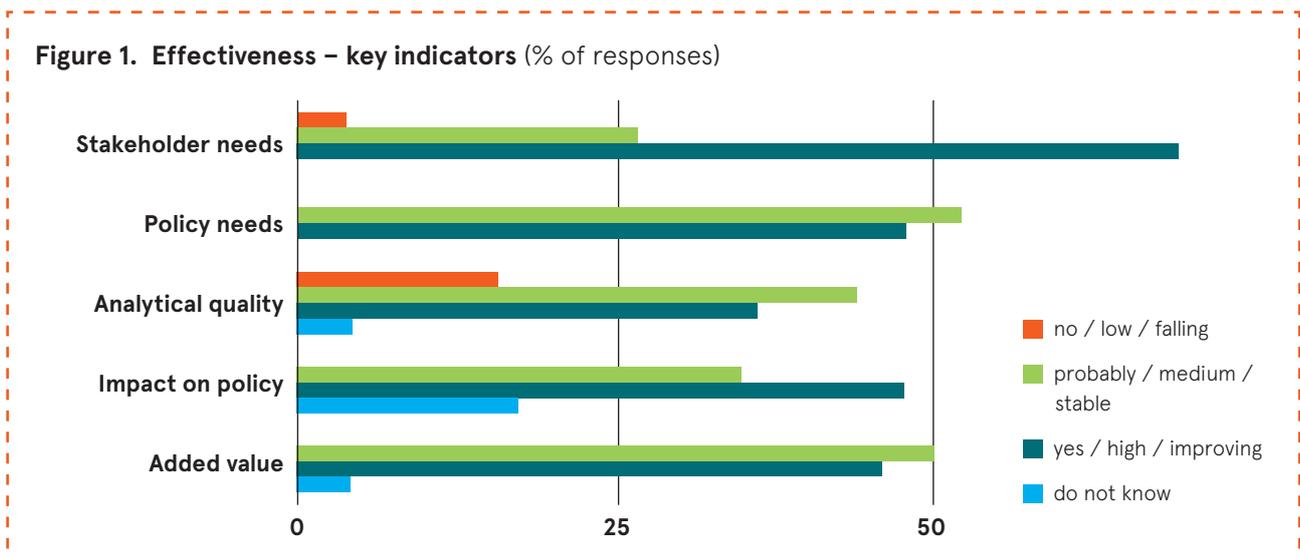
- Assessments meet the needs of stakeholders and policy-makers
- Analytical quality is medium to high
- Assessments provide added value

Eighty per cent of the responses said that the assessments are of medium to high **analytical quality**, and about 15 per cent identified the analytical quality as low.

Almost all stakeholders indicated that the assessments probably have or do have an **impact on environmental policy-making**, while 20 per cent of the respondents were not able to answer this question.

About 95 per cent of the responses indicated that the environmental assessments probably meet or do meet the **needs of stakeholders** and adequately respond to **environmental policy needs**.

According to stakeholders, the assessments probably or and do provide **added value** at the national level.



Quality

Key messages

- Overall quality is medium to high and is increasing over time
- Topical coverage, reliability and communication are sufficient
- The timeliness of some documents could be improved
- Independence is ranked as medium
- Quality of the assessments over the time is improving

Overall quality was rated as medium to high.

The **sufficiency** of the reports was rated as medium to high by 90 per cent of the responses. One notable deficiency that was mentioned is that the assessments do not reflect the state of the art in solid municipal waste, and they include no monitoring data and no information on the impact of dump sites on the environment.

Timeliness is also rated as medium to high (about 85 per cent of the responses). About 15 per cent of the responses

ranked timeliness as low, in particular, mentioning that data in the 2010 state-of-the-environment report are outdated, while they are up-to-date in the report to CBD. Whereas information on greenhouse gas emissions is seen as reliable, some data in the communication to UNFCCC are slightly outdated, too: the report does not consider the Fifth report of the IPCC and has no detailed assessment and outlook for water resources under climate change.

Almost all users rated **topical coverage** as medium to high, but energy and Chernobyl-related issues were mentioned as not fully covered.

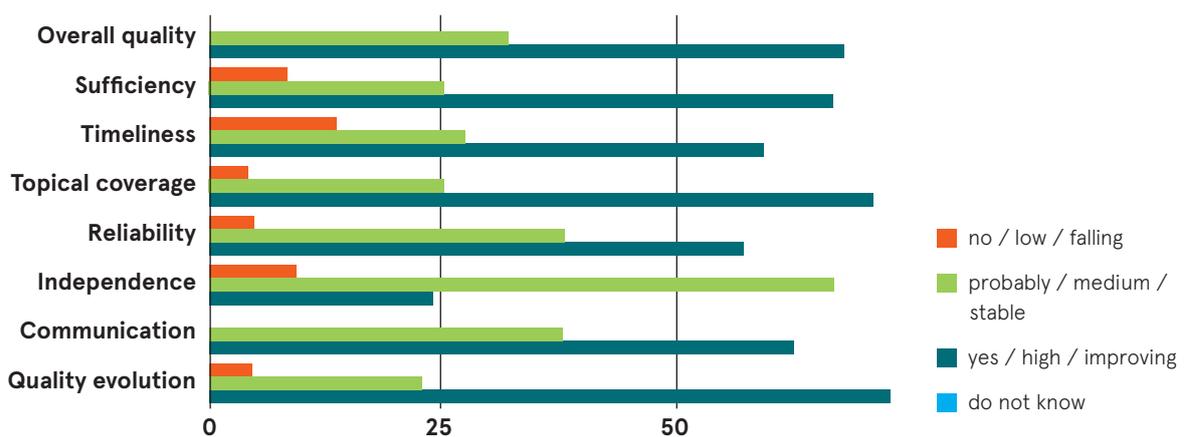
Reliability was considered as medium to high by 95 per cent of responses.

Independence was ranked as high by 25 per cent, as medium by 60 per cent and as low by 15 per cent of the responses.

The **communication** of the reports was rated as medium to high. Some visuals were, however, considered of low quality.

About 95 per cent of the responses state that the **quality of reports over time** is improving.

Figure 2. Quality of assessments (% of responses)



Efficiency

Key messages

- Assessments do provide relevant information and play a role in environmental policy
- Some stakeholders were not aware of how the costs of assessments related to the benefits
- There is medium to high potential for optimisation

The use of **analytical methods and tools** was seen as probably appropriate and sufficient by 80 per cent of the responses. The lack of cause-effect analysis was, however, noted by some responders.

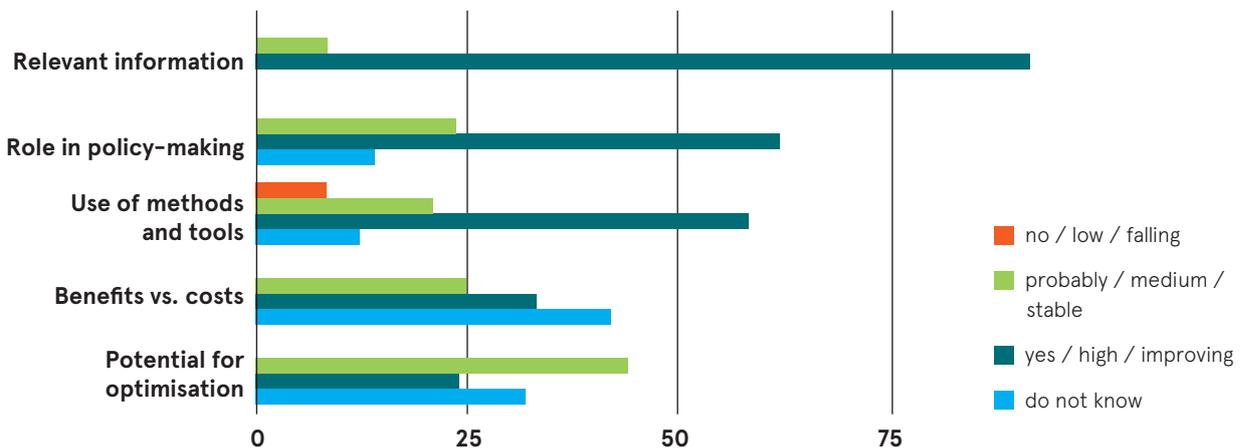
More than 40 per cent of the respondents did not know whether the **benefits** of the reports outweighed the **costs**, and the rest answered that the benefits probably did outweigh the costs.

According to 90 per cent of the responses, the assessment reports do deliver **relevant information**.

In the opinion of 75 per cent of the respondents, the assessments also play a role in **environmental policy-making** in the country. The respondents commented that the assessments were used as inputs to the strategy for managing water resources under climate change until 2030.

Respondents generally believed that there is medium to high **potential for optimisation** of the assessment process. Thirty per cent of respondents were not able to answer this question.

Figure 3. Efficiency – key indicators (% of responses)



Policy impact

Key messages

- Assessments moderately to significantly help in identifying policy interventions and in determining their scope and scale
- Assessments moderately to significantly help in choosing and developing policy instruments

The assessments significantly or very significantly help identifying necessary **policy interventions** according to 70 per cent of the responses.

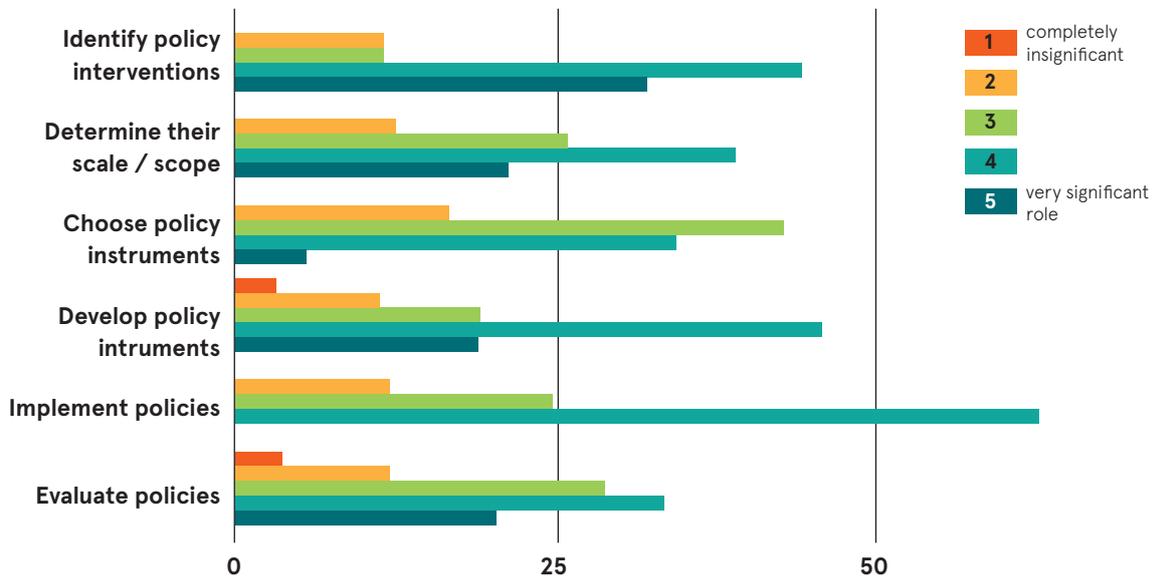
The documents moderately to very significantly help in determining their **scale and scope** (about 85 per cent of the responses) and in choosing **policy instruments** (80 per cent of the responses).

About 80 per cent of the responses said that the assessments moderately to significantly help develop **policy instruments**, while 20 per cent ranked this role as insignificant or completely insignificant.

About 60 per cent of responses ranked the assessments as significantly helping in **implementing policies**, 25 per cent as moderately and 15 per cent as insignificantly.

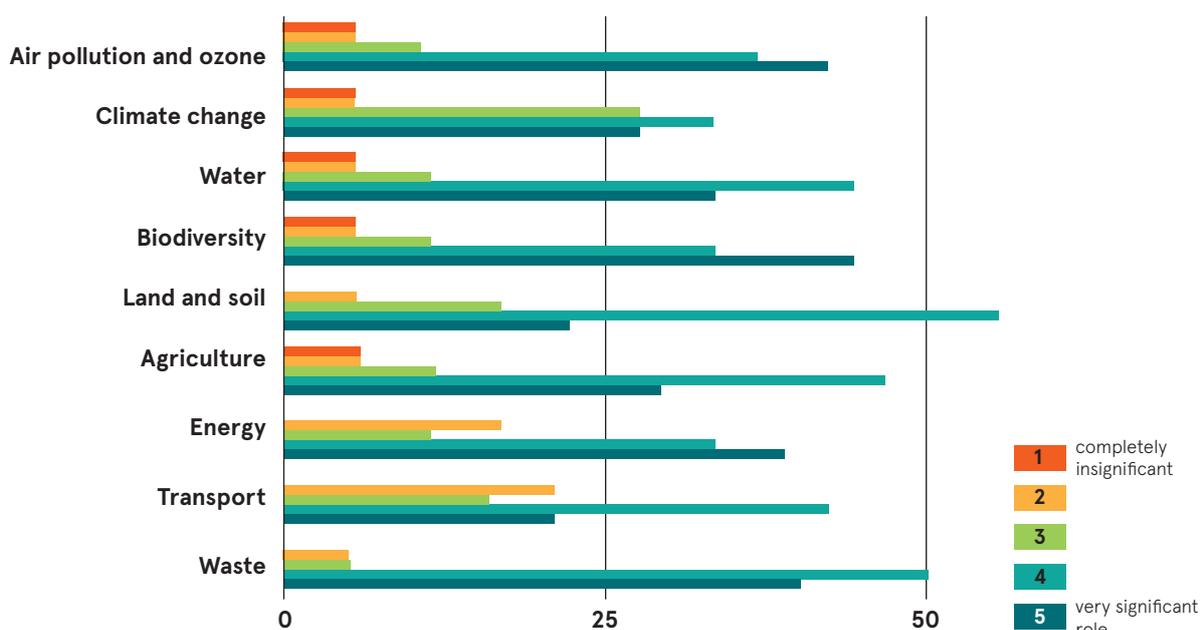
In the opinion of all respondents, the assessments help **evaluate** the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies moderately to significantly.

Figure 4. Policy relevance and impact (% of responses)



Overall, the demand for these kinds of reports is very high. The respondents believe that these and similar environmental assessments **are particularly needed** in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to all areas in the questionnaire to a high or very high extent. The land and soil theme received a somewhat lower score.

Figure 5. Future demand for assessments (% of responses)



Awareness and outreach

Key messages

- Assessments are available online at nationally managed or convention websites
- Awareness of the assessments is not high

It was not possible for MNREP to provide data about the distribution and awareness of environmental assessments, but some findings were made based on information from the Aarhus centre in Minsk as well as direct searches on the Internet.

All three documents are available online, either on the website of the Ministry and supervised entities (SoR, UNFCCC report) or on the international convention website (CBD report).

The 27 environmental NGOs in Belarus registered with the Ministry of Justice as of August 2015 are generally aware of environmental assessment publications in the country.

Google searches for report titles returned three (CBD) to 20 (UNFCCC) entries per title.

Overall it seems that awareness of the assessments in Belarus is not high and there is a room for improvement.

3 Conclusions and considerations

The overall effectiveness of the assessments is high though they tend to be rather descriptive, and they lack concrete recommendations and cause-effect analyses. The presentation and analysis of information about some topics (like solid waste, energy and radiation) can be improved.

Considerations

- Cause-effect analysis should be strengthened
- Practical recommendations should be prepared and presented

The overall quality of the assessments is evaluated as high. The 2010 state-of-the-environment report is considered outdated, as are some data in the national communication to UNFCCC.

Consideration

- The frequency of state-of-the-environment reporting may need to be revisited and increased

The assessments provide for high sufficiency, timeliness, topical coverage (except for energy issues in the state-of-the-environment report), reliability, and medium independence and communication quality.

Consideration

- Underrepresented issues (waste, energy, Chernobyl-related issues) should get stronger attention

The assessments provide relevant information, and they play a significant role in environmental policy-making. It is unclear whether the benefits of the reports justify the costs as almost half of the respondents are generally unaware of the relevant costs, while another large proportion of the respondents believes that the cost-benefit ratio is appropriate. As always, according to the response to the survey, there is still room for optimization.

Considerations

- Policy-makers and stakeholders should be made aware of the costs of assessments
- Optimisation of the preparation of the assessments should be considered

These and similar assessment reports are needed to improve the country performance with respect to all the suggested thematic areas.

Consideration

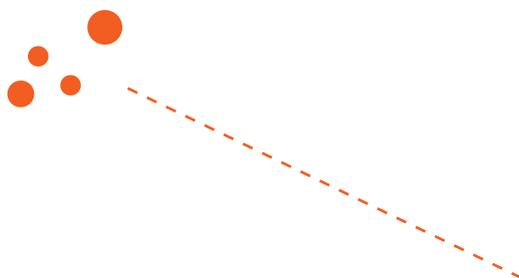
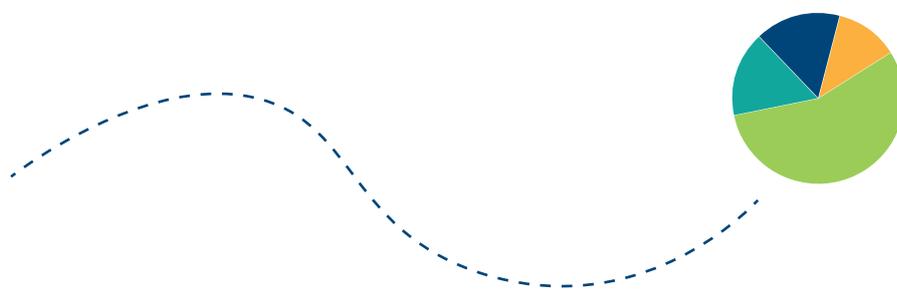
- For some thematic chapters, the development of more detailed and focused thematic chapters and recommendations in state-of-the-environment report should be considered

Relatively little is known about user awareness of environmental assessments, and there is room for improvement.

Considerations

- Systematic collection of the data on the use of environmental assessments should be ensured
- An active approach to the communication and promotion of assessments should be developed

ANNEXES



Annex 1 Interviewed organisations

Ministry of Finances

Ministry of Transport and Communication

Ministry of Industry

Ministry of Education

Ministry of Emergency

Minsk City Administration

Central Research Institute for Complex Use of Water Resources

Institute for Nature Use

Belarusian State University, Faculty of Geography, Department of Earth Science and Hydrometeorology

Aarhus Centre (Minsk)

Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies

Association of European Business

State Enterprise "Operator for Secondary Raw Materials"

Annex 2 Summary of responses to the survey

I. Effectiveness

1 Key indicators of effectiveness

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA match the needs and requirements of the stakeholder?	18	7	0	1
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?	11	12	0	0
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?	9	11	1	4
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?	11	8	4	0
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?	11	12	1	0

2 Overall quality of the Environmental Assessment reports

	Low	Medium	High
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports	0	8	17

3 Overall, how would you rate the quality of the information provided in the Environmental Assessment reports by the following criteria?

	Low	Medium	High
3.1 Sufficiency	2	6	16
3.2 Timeliness	3	6	13
3.3 Topical coverage	1	6	17
3.4 Reliability	1	8	12
3.5 Independence	2	14	5
3.6 Well-communicated	0	9	15

4 Development of the Environmental Assessment reports quality

	Falling	Stable	Improving
4.1 How would you evaluate the development of quality of the Environmental Assessment reports in recent years?	1	5	16

II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?	22	2	0	0
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?	13	5	3	0
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?	14	5	3	2
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?	8	6	10	0
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?	6	11	8	0

2 Did the EA reports deliver information to...

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
2.1 help identify necessary policy interventions?	0	3	3	11	8
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?	0	3	6	9	5
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?	0	6	15	12	2
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?	1	3	5	12	5
2.5 help implement policies?	0	3	6	15	0
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?	1	3	7	8	5

3 These and similar Environmental Assessment reports are particularly needed in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
3.1. Air pollution and ozone depletion	1	1	2	7	8
3.2. Climate change	1	1	5	6	5
3.3 Water	1	1	2	8	6
3.4 Biodiversity	1	1	2	6	8
3.5 Land and soil	0	1	3	10	4
3.6 Agriculture	1	1	2	8	5
3.7 Energy	0	3	2	6	7
3.8 Transport	0	4	3	8	4
3.9 Waste	0	1	1	10	8

Annex 3 Evaluation tool (the questionnaire)

EEA Evaluation tool:

Scope and key questions of the evaluation of recent national Environmental Assessments (EA)

NOTE: the tables below are to be filled for all the publications selected for review. Please put publication symbols in cells corresponding to the respondent's opinion about these publications. Example:

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports	B	S	W, A	

S: SoE report; **W:** Thematic reports on water; **A:** Thematic reports on air / climate; **B:** Thematic reports on biodiversity

Effectiveness and efficiency – the two dimensions of the evaluation:

✓ I. Effectiveness

1 Key indicators of effectiveness

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No	Comment
1.1 Did the EA match the needs and requirements of the stakeholder?					
1.2 Did the EA respond adequately to environmental policy needs?					
1.3 Is the EA's analysis of consistently high quality?					
1.4 Do the EA findings have an impact on environmental policy-making or likely to have such impact in the future?					
1.5 Did the EA provide added value at the national level?					

2 Overall quality of the Environmental Assessment reports

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports				

3 Overall, how would you rate the quality of the information provided in the Environmental Assessment reports by the following criteria?

	Low	Medium	High	Comment
3.1 Sufficiency				
3.2 Timeliness				
3.3 Topical coverage				
3.4 Reliability				
3.5 Independence				
3.6 Well-communicated				

4 Development of the Environmental Assessment reports quality

	Falling	Stable	Improving
4.1 How would you evaluate the development of quality of the Environmental Assessment reports in recent years?			

✓ II. Efficiency

1 Key indicators of efficiency

	Yes	Probably	Do not know	No	Comment
1.1 Did the EA deliver relevant information?					
1.2 Did the EA play a role in environmental policy-making in the country?					
1.3 Is the use of analytical methods and tools in the EA appropriate and sufficient?					
1.4 Did the EA represent value for money comparing the costs and benefits?					
1.5 Is there any potential for optimisation of the EA with regard to a modern and efficiently operational work flow?					

2 Did the EA reports deliver information to...

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
2.1 help identify necessary policy interventions?					
2.2. help determine the scale and scope of policy interventions?					
2.3 help choose policy instruments (legal, awareness raising etc.)?					
2.4 help develop policy instruments (including setting their targets and indicators)?					
2.5 help implement policies?					
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies?					

3 These and similar Environmental Assessment reports are particularly needed in order to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to

	Completely insignificant role (1)	2	3	4	Very significant role (5)
3.1. Air pollution and ozone depletion					
3.2. Climate change					
3.3 Water					
3.4 Biodiversity					
3.5 Land and soil					
3.6 Agriculture					
3.7 Energy					
3.8 Transport					
3.9 Waste					

