

Effectiveness and relevance of recent environmental assessments for policy-making and public information in the Eastern Partnership region

Working paper, October 2017



Cover design: Zoï Environment Network
Layout: Zoï Environment Network / Maria Libert

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017

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Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by Zoï Environment Network with the support of the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus and contributions from many participants of the user survey in ENI East partner countries.

The lead author from Zoï Environment Network was Nikolai Denisov, with contributions from Lesya Nikolayeva, Otto Simonett and Tamara Kutonova from Zoï Environment Network; Evgenia Mekhtieva, Nune Harutyunyan, Sophiko Akhobadze and Malak Shukurova from REC Caucasus; and Jana Tafi, Victoria Goncharova, Galina Georgieva Hristova, Adriana Gheorghe, Jean-Nicolas Poussart and Tommi Multala from the European Environment Agency.

Additional EEA support and guidance were received from David Stanners.

The European Environment Agency and Zoï Environment Network thank ENI SEIS II East focal points, the national and municipal authorities, Aarhus centres, and non-governmental, academic and other organisations in the partner countries for contributing to the study, and for providing their opinions and additional information.

Thanks also go to Geoffrey Hughes (Zoï Environment Network) for editing of the English-language edition, to Vadim Vinichenko and Marina Denisova (Zoï Environment Network) for Russian translation and copy-editing, and to Maria Libert (Zoï Environment Network) for graphic production and layout.

1 Introduction

The systematic production of assessments and indicators from countries and regions is a clearly emerging need at the global level. What is important here is a better understanding of the current and future challenges facing decision makers responsible for ensuring that integrated assessments remain relevant and knowledge-based. The new reporting system for Sustainable Development Goals put in place by the United Nations in 2015 provides a clear focus for assessments and contributes to the Global Sustainable Development Report.

Working under different legislative settings, the Eastern Partnership countries need to establish their regular national assessment and reporting processes in order to be able to respond to national and regional policy requests with the necessary information. Contributing to the implementation of the ratified UNECE Aarhus Convention these countries publish their national state-of-the-environment reports. The majority of these countries have available online data in support of the commonly agreed upon environmental indicators within UNECE, while the assessment component remains limited, irregular or delayed. These key messages derived from the set of reports of the European Environment Agency (EEA) assessment of assessments project.¹

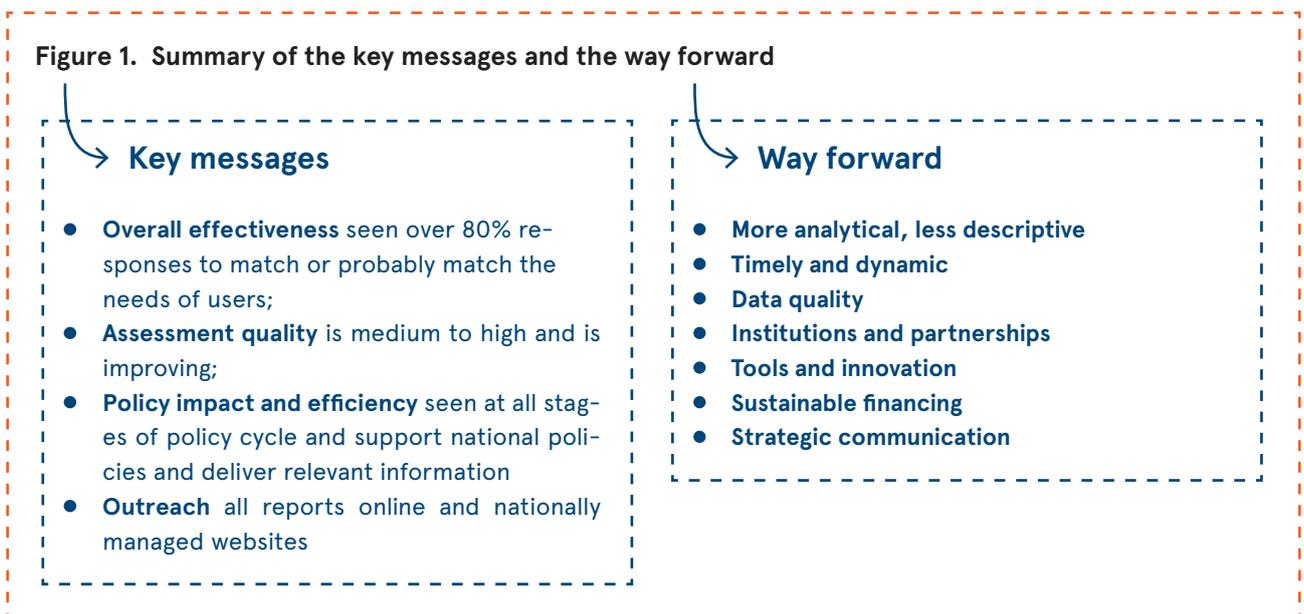
The ministers' decisions in the 8th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in June 2016 highlighted the need of a Shared Environmental Information System for putting in place a regular process of environmental assessment across the pan-European region by 2020.² This is in line with an increasing requirement for a more coordinated and modern approach to streamlining the assessment landscape in response to various reporting obligations. It will also allow for a better link between assessment and reporting for multiple decision- and policy-making processes.

A clear demand from the previous cooperation with the Eastern Partnership region and under the ENPI-SEIS project (2010-2015) was the inclusion of a dedicated assessment component linked to the work on indicators. In the context of the ENI SEIS II East project and in order to set up a baseline for the development of environmental assessment reports, a study evaluated the recent environmental assessment reports in these countries and identified a road map into the future. This report presents key messages and outlines the way forward, as summarized in Figure 1 below:

1 European Environment Agency. *Europe's environment – An assessment of assessments*. Copenhagen, 2011 presented at the 7th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Astana (September 2011)

2 Ministerial Declaration of the 8th "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference in Batumi (June 2016).

Figure 1. Summary of the key messages and the way forward



2 Objective and approach

This report synthesises the results of a survey of the users of environmental assessments in six countries of the European Union's Eastern neighbourhood: Belarus, Moldova¹ and Ukraine in Eastern Europe, and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the South Caucasus. The direct objective of the study, which was organised under the umbrella of the EU-funded project, "Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) principles and practices in the European neighbourhood regions (ENI SEIS II East)", 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 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 assessment reports. The interviews and the initial analysis were carried out by Zoï field staff in Kyiv for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and by the Regional Environment Centre for the South Caucasus in Tbilisi for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. 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 each of the countries.

¹ The official name of the country is the Republic of Moldova. The name Moldova is used for the purpose of this report.

Table 1. Environmental assessments offered for review (year and language of publication)

	INTEGRATED ASSESSMENTS National state-of-the-environment reports	CLIMATE CHANGE national communications to UNFCCC	BIODIVERSITY national reports to CBD
Belarus	2010 Russian	2015 Russian	2014 Russian
Moldova	2011 Moldovan, 2015 English	2013 Moldovan	2015 English
Ukraine	2014 Ukrainian	2013 Russian	2015 Ukrainian
Armenia	2011 Armenian	2015 Armenian	2014 Armenian
Azerbaijan	2013 Azeri	2015 Azeri	2014 English
Georgia	2014 Georgian	2015 English	2014 English

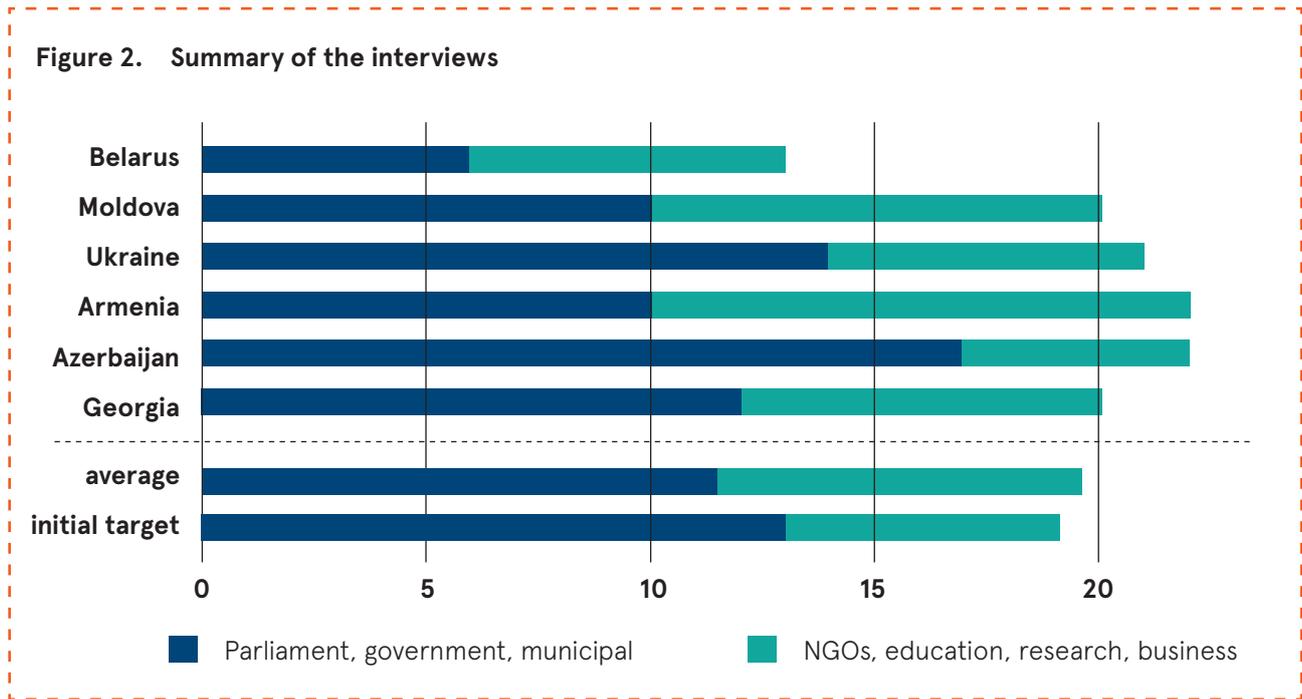
Interviews in each country were based on selected national environmental assessments (Table 1; see Annex 4 for more details). These included the latest available integrated state-of-the-environment reports as well as thematic reports. In the majority of the countries, thematic reports are prepared mostly for reporting to international agreements, so the review used reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In Moldova, two state-of-the-environment reports were reviewed by users, one being a recent assessment following the DPSIR framework with the support of the EEA.

The intended respondents included policy-makers from environmental as well as non-environmental sectors of the government, selected representatives of research, academia and business as well as civil society (Annex 3). Among the latter, priority was given to NGO members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

Overall, 118 interviews were conducted in May–June 2017 through face-to-face meetings, by telephone or by correspondence (Figure 2).

This synthesis report analyses the interview responses and examines the perceived usefulness and impact of environmental assessments in the ENI region as a whole, and draws conclusions for improving them. The simultaneously published reports for individual countries provide more detailed per-country results and findings.

”
I would like to see more visual information in the reports: graphs, diagrams, tables with trends.”



3 Findings and key messages

This chapter analyses the responses to the survey questionnaire, focusing on average scores for the six ENI East countries taken together, and identifying notable differences between the averages and the responses from individual countries (see Annex 1 for the details). Figures 3-7 present the collective averages across the range of indicators considered.

Overall effectiveness

Key messages

- Assessments are largely seen as useful and unique sources of environmental information
- Analytically sound, they nonetheless have room for improvement
- Policy impact is acknowledged but is not always known by users

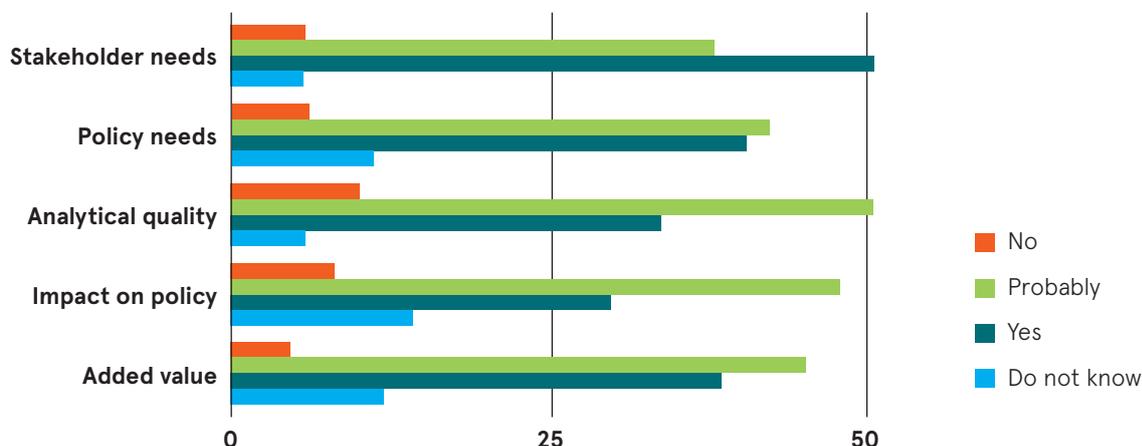
Overall, over 80 per cent of the responses to the survey¹ assert that the available environmental assessments match or *probably* match the **needs of stakeholders** and (with somewhat lower certainty) the **needs of environmental policy-making**. A similar majority confirms the **added value** of the assessments, with some of the users² stating that such reports are about the only source of proper environmental information available in the countries. Interestingly, in answering the questions about meeting needs of policy-making and adding value, a notable share of Moldova and Ukraine users (20 – 30% of responses) chose the “I do not know” option thus indicating that they are unable to judge the practical value of their national assessment reports.

”
[Such assessments are] good for making decisions by middle-level officials. What politicians need is an executive version with high-quality illustrations.”

1 Analysed here are the statistics derived from the number and proportion of responses, rather than of individual respondents: for a particular question, one respondent may have provided one integrated answer concerning multiple assessments, evaluated assessments separately, or provided no answer at all. The average percentage figures analysed in the report are obtained by averaging the respective percentage figures across the surveyed countries.

2 References to individual comments in this section do not necessarily reflect the statistical majority of opinions within the respective countries (cf. annex 1) but rather help contribute to the discussion of the findings.

Figure 3. Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



The *probably* high **analytical quality** of environmental assessments is acknowledged by half of the responses, and another quarter rated the quality of analysis as unquestionably high. A user in Armenia praised the high-quality of analysis in reports to UNFCCC and CBD. More critical users in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine nonetheless noted that sometimes the focus of the assessments is descriptive rather than analytical, and may not include the critical assessment of data, cause-effect relationships and actionable recommendations.

“
Once information is out that the report is published, it would be timely to issue a short presentation with its key findings or arrange a press conference. This would improve communication.”

Opinions differ on the **impact** or **potential impact** of the assessments on **environmental policy** differ.

While on average almost 80 per cent of responses (over 90% in Azerbaijan and Georgia) indicate that such impact or potential impact exists or *probably* exists, the majority of users were after all not entirely certain (*probably* is chosen in almost 50% of responses), whereas

many users in Belarus and Moldova found it difficult to answer this question at all. Similarly, while a user in Armenia commented that assessments play a role in environmental policy-making and that strategies and planning are based on their findings, respondents in Ukraine (36% of responses for “no impact” responses) and Moldova commented that recommendations of the reports are rarely used by policy-makers.

Quality

Key messages

- Assessment quality is medium to high by most of the indicators, and is improving or stable
- Most users get reports in a timely manner, although country situations and demand vary
- Communication quality is medium to high, and in some cases visuals can be improved

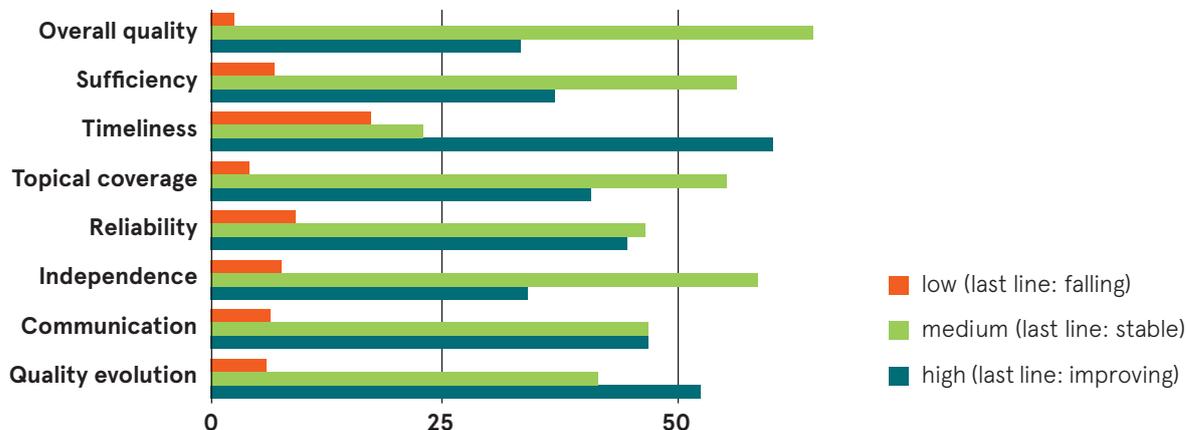
Two thirds of responses rated the **overall quality** of the reviewed assessments as medium, and one third as high. (In contrast, 60 per cent of the responses in Belarus and Georgia rated the overall quality as high.)

All of the specific indicators of quality were rated medium to high in 80 – 95 per cent of responses, although there are variations among them and among the individual country scores.

On average, medium prevailed over high scores in responses about the assessments’ **sufficiency**, **topical coverage** and **reliability**. Yet there are variations among the countries:

- users in Belarus, and to a lesser extent in Georgia, rate the sufficiency of their environmental assessments highly;
- high scores for topical coverage were given in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova;
- in Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia users rated the reliability of the reports relatively highly.

Figure 4. Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



At the same time, users mention the lack of information about waste and emergency situations in Moldova, topical gaps in the national communication to UNFCCC in Azerbaijan, and the lack of coverage of Chernobyl-related and energy issues in Belarus and Ukraine. Several users commented on the need to better address the integration of environmental concerns into sectoral policies. Lack of targets and indicators was mentioned, too, as well as often insufficient information about past trends and possible future developments.

” *I am looking for content that can answer questions, rather than mere statistics. We need more information about cause-effect relationships.*”

In several instances users criticised what they perceive as the insufficient quality of data in the assessment reports: from the lack of original research and monitoring underpinning the assessments, to a failure to fully use trusted outside sources of information (such as independent research or public monitoring), to using unreliable and poorly referenced sources that are impossible to verify. Mistakes in data interpretation were noticed, too, as well as the lack of editorial control, which can lead to inconsistencies among different chapters of the same report.

The **timeliness** results show the widest variation. Among all categories, timeliness drew on average both the most high ratings and the most low ratings. It also provoked a wide range of opinions: It also provoked a wide range of opinions: from rated low in 63 per cent of responses in Ukraine to high in 70 – 90 per cent in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. In several countries users commented that data used in the assessments can be old, especially in state-of-the-environment reports as opposed to reports to international conventions. A respondent in Belarus suggested that the five-year period between editions of the state-of-the-environment report is too long.

In all countries **independence** was more often rated as medium than high. Some respondents in Moldova and Ukraine point to the inherent lack of independence of environmental assessments as reporting authorities are the same as those responsible for the successes (or failures) of environmental performance. At the same time users in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan commented that their assessments – in light of the engagement of independent experts – are relatively independent.

” *We need more practical recommendations for how to solve problems rather than the same information repeated from one edition to the next. There is no trend analysis, and we need that, too.*”

The quality of the assessments’ **communication** is rated medium to high in equal numbers of responses. Users in

Belarus and Georgia appreciate that aspect of their assessments, while more than 20 per cent of responses in Ukraine rated communication as low. A user in Georgia specifically pointed out that assessments’ findings were targeted towards the country’s legal and executive authorities. Other users quoted cases of the lack or insufficient quality of visuals, the low readability of some of the reports, and the lack of promotion of the assessments once they are published (cf. the Outreach section below).

Users in all six countries believe that the overall quality of their assessments remains **stable** or is **improving**. The most optimistic were respondents in Georgia and Belarus (improvement noted in, respectively, 73% and 96% of responses). A user in Moldova suggested that the country’s latest state-of-the-environment report, developed with EEA support, has been a substantial step forward.

Policy impact and efficiency

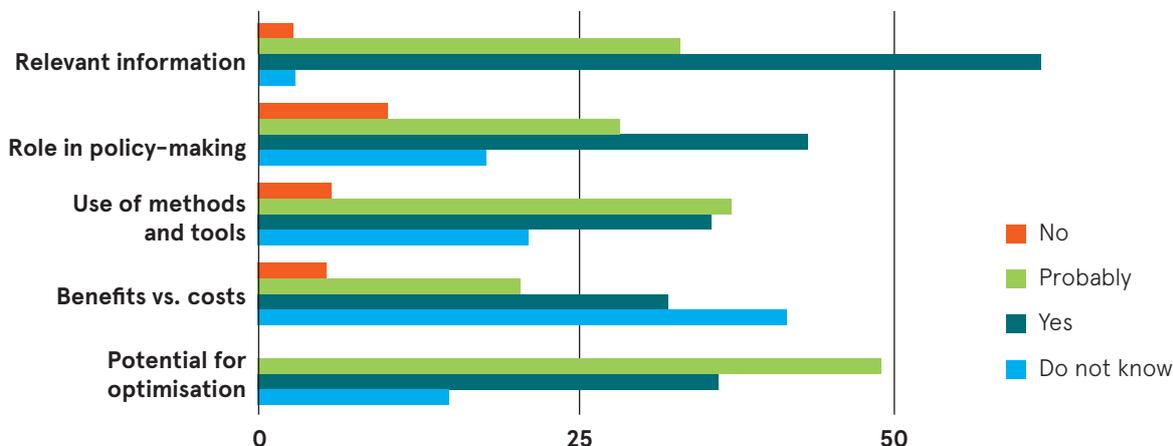
Key messages

- Assessments support all stages of the environmental policy cycle to varying degrees
- Modern tools and techniques are used, but production can be further optimised
- Users cannot say whether the benefits of assessments outweigh their costs
- Future demand for environmental assessments is high in all policy areas

Most respondents (including strong majorities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) believe that their countries’ environmental assessments deliver **relevant information**.

Consistently with answers to the questions in the Effectiveness section, the majority of responses said that assessments **support national environmental policies**, although one quarter of the responses in Armenia and Ukraine said they did not. A large numbers of users in Ukraine and Georgia (respectively, 26% and 37% of responses) had difficulties answering this question. A respondent in Moldova noted the use of national communications to UNFCCC for drafting the national strategies for adaptation to climate change and

Figure 5. Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



for low-carbon development; similarly, in Azerbaijan the national communication to UNFCCC helped in the design of the strategic roadmap for agricultural development, and Georgia drafted new policies and laws based on information provided in the assessment reports.

Users believe that the assessments use or *probably* use **modern analytical tools**, although uncertainty here is high, as 20 – 40 per cent of users in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine were unable to answer. A user in Ukraine commented that some of the tools are not always up-to-date or may not be adequately adapted to national needs and conditions.

“
We very rarely use biodiversity and climate assessments since our work is more related to water and waste.”

A large majority of users (85% of responses) indicate that the production of assessments can be further optimised by using modern and more efficient approaches.

The question about whether the **benefits** of assessments justify the **costs** produced the largest uncertainty: although more than half of responses confirmed that the benefits of the assessments *probably* or do outweigh the costs, about 40 per cent of the users (including 60% in Moldova and 76% in Ukraine) were unable to answer the question. Many users commented that they did not have access to information about assessment costs.

Figure 6. Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

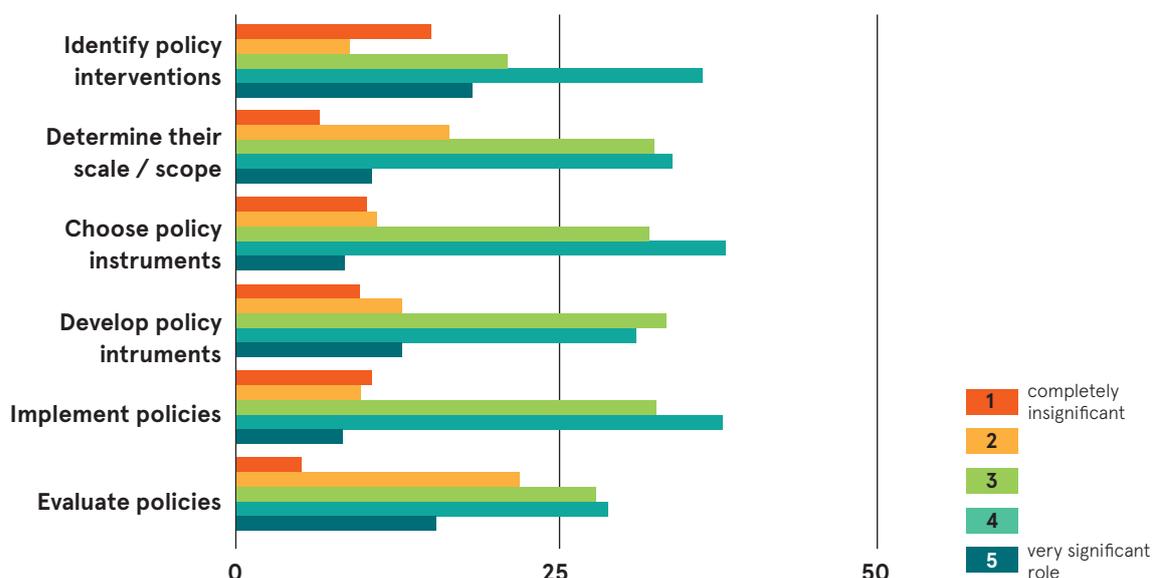
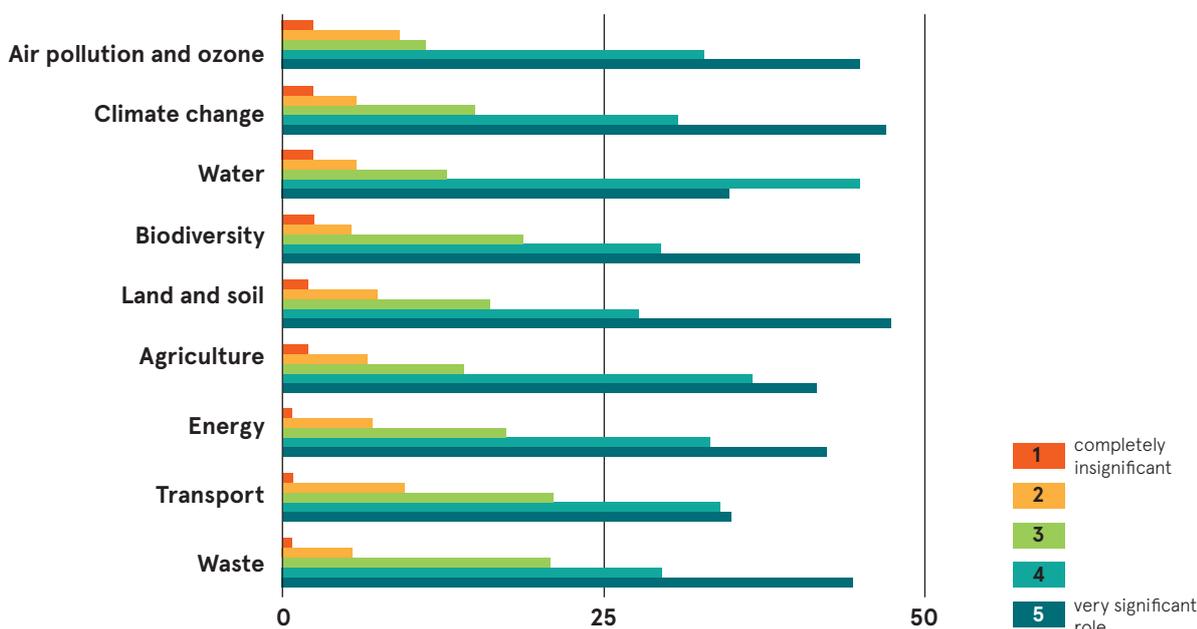


Figure 7. Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)



About 45 – 50 per cent of the responses deemed the role of assessments in the various **phases of the environmental policy cycle** as moderate to significant. Higher scores were given in Georgia and Belarus; lower in Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. There was little difference among scores given to impacts at the different phases of the policy cycle, although the impact on **policy identification** got both the highest and the lowest scores: 54 per cent significant to very significant on average, with 76 per cent in Belarus and 84 per cent in Georgia, and 15 per cent completely insignificant on average, with 62 per cent in Armenia.

Future demand for assessments was considered strong: 70 – 80 per cent significant to very significant responses in all thematic areas.

”
Practically all the information sources originate from the same executive authority, which is also the author of the report. This makes unbiased assessment of data quality difficult.”

Outreach

Key messages

- All reports are accessible online, in most cases through nationally managed websites
- The visibility of assessments and outreach both online and through NGOs and the media can be improved
- The collection and use of web access statistics and other tools for monitoring outreach can be much improved too

In all the countries, the state-of-the-environment reports assessed in the study are accessible online. State-of-the-environment reports and national communications to UNFCCC can be accessed through nationally managed websites (Table 2). The latter in most cases are hosted by organisations responsible for climate-change reporting on behalf of national environmental authorities (with the exception of Georgia where it is hosted by the UNDP country office). Reports to UNFCCC and CBD can also be accessed through websites of the secretariats (in Ukraine and Armenia the reports to CBD are equally accessible through a nationally managed website).

Table 2. Accessibility of the assessments at nationally managed websites

	National state-of-the-environment reports	National communications to UNFCCC*	National reports to CBD*
Belarus	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Protection	Belarusian Research Centre Ecology	-
Moldova	Ministry of the Environment**	Climate Change Office	-
Ukraine	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources	State Environmental Investment Agency***	-
Armenia	Ministry of Nature Protection	Climate Change Information Centre	Environmental Project Implementation Unit
Azerbaijan	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources	-
Georgia	Environmental Education and Information Centre	UNDP Country Office	-

* National communications to UNFCCC and national reports to CBD are also accessible through the websites of the Conventions' secretariats

** Since the publication of the reports, the functions of the Ministry of the Environment have been transferred according to the new structure of the Government of the Republic of Moldova.

*** Since the publication of the national communication, the functions of SEIS have been transferred to the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources.

In order to evaluate the electronic dissemination of environmental assessments, web access statistics were collected where such data were available from hosting organisations. Specifically, Ukraine reported 34,000 visits since August 2013 (ca. 8,500 visits a year) to the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources website page with links to annual environmental reports. In 2016 alone the 2014 state-of-the-environment report was downloaded 49 times. Moldova's third national communication to UNFCCC hosted online by the Climate Change Office has been downloaded 1,500 times (over 300 times a year) since its publication in 2013.

An Internet search for titles of the assessments in Belarus, Ukraine and Azerbaijan returns 3 – 20 references per publication as compared to 30 for the English version of *The European Environment – State and Outlook 2015*. This shows that the publications are visible on the Internet, but the degree of their visibility can be improved.

Other data on the promotion, dissemination and use of assessments on the country level were similarly scarce. According to Aarhus centres and other sources, there are 10 – 40 active environmental NGOs in each of the countries. In many instances, they regularly receive official environmental information and are likely to be aware of the latest environmental assessments. More precise estimates could not be obtained without further research. To the best of ENI SEIS II project counterparts' knowledge, no information was available about articles, press communications or national information campaigns related to published environmental assessments. Ukraine was the only country reporting regular public inquiries to the national environmental authority concerning state-of-the-environment reports.

” *Very much missing are overall strategic directions at the end of every chapter. In most cases, there are only lists of very specific actions for solving concrete problems.* **”**

The promotion and dissemination of assessments tend to be most successful when done in a larger environmental policy context: Armenia reported broad outreach with its third national communication to UNFCCC as part of a UN-DP-led, large-scale national campaign to build awareness about climate change at large.

In several cases ministries or other state agencies reported that they seldom or never read environmental assessments either because the topic is outside their mandate, or because the reports have never been officially submitted upon publication by the environmental authorities. This shows both the limitations and the potential of the administrative track for disseminating assessment results on the inter-agency level.

Overall, as the results in this section show, there clearly exist major gaps and thus opportunities with respect to making environmental assessments better known, more widely accessed and eventually used.

”
The thing is that any degree of quality and timeliness [of such assessments] only weakly influences environmental action... In other words, experts need this information very much, but who reads what experts write?”

”
Another reason these and similar reports are needed is to enable people to exercise their environmental rights.”

”
In addition to the main report it might be good to present a shortened version for different audiences. It may include only the main messages focused on practical measures.”

”
I am not sure that those who are in charge of preparing and making decisions take full account of the information in these assessments.”

4 Conclusions and considerations for the way forward

The conclusions of the study are based on the statistical results of the survey, comments received from individual users, data about the dissemination and use of assessment information, and other information and knowledge obtained through the study.

Experience and expertise in environmental assessment in Eastern Europe and in the South Caucasus date back several decades, are mature and have delivered acknowledged results. Indeed, some of the users responding to the survey commented that such reports are about the only source of proper environmental information available in the countries. Environmental assessments are used both by environmental professionals, and those working in the fields of energy, agriculture, territorial and urban planning, education and research.

Assessments are recognised as unique and potentially powerful tools to improve actual environmental performance, yet their impact at the various stages of the policy cycle remains limited. Partially this can be explained by the fact that assessments, mandated by legislation, are often not produced with the explicit intention of making a policy impact. Formal and practical links between assessments and action remain weak, especially outside the environmental domain, and in order to reach broader audiences, the assessments need to become more relevant and analytical, and to communicate their messages more effectively.

The study finds room for improvement in the current approaches, methodology, capacities and resources. The conclusions and particularly the considerations focus on some of the ways to improve the effectiveness of assessments and their impact on policy-making, public awareness and environmental performance.

More analytical, less descriptive

According to the survey, the users believe that the already solid analytical quality of assessments can be improved. Some still see the existing environmental assessments as not sufficiently concrete and lacking cause-effect analyses and tangible recommendations. The high future demand for environmental assessments across many thematic areas indicates a need to strengthen sectoral analysis and policy recommendations.

Considerations

- Strengthen cause-effect analyses using the DP-SIR analytical framework and a system of environmental indicators and targets, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to benchmark national environmental performance
- Strengthen sector-specific analyses and recommendations targeting policies and actions in the principal economic sectors affecting the environmental situation in the countries

” I could imagine more active engagement of interested parties in the development and formulation of recommendations.”

Timely and dynamic

Although overall the users are satisfied with the timeliness of the assessments, some nonetheless believe that reports come out too late to ensure their effective use, and when they do come out they report data that are already old and thus not relevant. Reports are sometimes also seen as too static, relying on figures and statements from previous editions while lacking the analysis of past trends and projections of future environmental issues and policy options.

Considerations

- Review the regularity of reporting, and strike a balance between unnecessarily frequent (costly and not very useful) and too infrequent production of the assessments
- Shorten the time lag between the publication of reports and the emergence of the data they are based on
- Expand the use of electronic systems and tools for continuously publishing and assessing key environmental indicators online

Data quality

Some of survey respondents link the reliability of environmental assessments to the quality of the data, and view insufficient data quality as one of the issues that may undermine trust in environmental assessments and therefore limit their use.

Considerations

- Regularly improve the selection of data sources used in the assessments, build solid information bases through monitoring, environmental statistics and the selective support and use of other accepted information sources including “citizen science”
- Ensure full transparency, referencing and documentation to enable verification of data sources
- Ensure editorial control to avoid discrepancies in facts and interpretations between the different parts of the same report, among different reports and vis-à-vis external sources

Institutions and partnerships

Independence of assessments scored medium throughout the survey, and several users noted that assessments prepared by the same environmental authorities that are in charge of designing and implementing environmental policies do not always serve as independent monitors. On the other hand, relying on external expertise in order to give assessments more independence may undermine continuity. Yet whatever the model, both producers and users of environmental assessments stand to benefit from the engagement of a wide spectrum of partners within and outside of government in the preparation and review of assessments. Such broad participation serves to improve quality, address controversies, ensure a broader dissemination and acceptance of the findings, and help communicate the results more widely. Building user capacities to better understand environmental assessments will also improve their use for decision- and policy-making.

” I do not like the style of the presentation of the content. The authors of the report are afraid of talking aloud about the real scale of the problems. At the same time small victories are inflated to a national scale.”

Considerations

- Explore the institutional model for environmental assessment best suited to country conditions, combining governmental mandates and continuity with a degree of independence sufficient to allow for unbiased analysis of environmental performance¹
- To the extent feasible, engage external partners such as sectoral authorities, regions and municipalities, academia and NGOs in assessment processes
- Build analytical and reporting capacities within governmental and external institutions capable of contributing to environmental assessments
- Build capacities of the public and policy-makers to better understand and use environmental assessments at different stages of the policy cycle

¹ See, for example, European Environment Agency. *State of the environment reporting: Institutional and legal arrangements in Europe*, Technical report No 26, Copenhagen, 1999).

Tools and innovation

Not yet being fully aware of the use of modern analytical techniques and tools for preparing the assessments, respondents to the survey noted their improvement in recent years. Technological innovation and modernisation in producing environmental assessments in line with best international and European practices are at least partially responsible for the improvement, and sustaining this trend and supporting the necessary qualifications of staff are important to the effort.

Considerations

- Sustain and expand the use of modern tools and techniques for environmental assessment, including environmental models, geographic information systems, environmental-economic accounting, scenario analysis and forecasting
- Ensure the continuous education of assessment experts and managers through professional training and hands-on exposure to best international practices, modern tools and techniques

Sustainable financing

Given that donors have funded many of the reviewed assessments, sustaining funds for future reports is vital. Expertise will not replace sustainable funding, and the lack of funding will make it impossible to attract the necessary expertise. In the long term, it is inevitable that national assessments, made to advance national policies, must be funded from the state budgets. Ensuring this, as well as filling the funding gap in the short term, remains challenging, especially when users of the assessments are not fully aware of their costs.

Considerations

- In the long term, ensure sustainable governmental financing of environmental assessment processes
- In the middle term, streamline and link external financing of environmental assessments to governmental mandates
- Fully inform policy-makers about the cost and value of environmental assessments

“ I am not sure that the current technical conditions of the hydrometeorological network make it meaningful to judge the reliability of the information it provides.”

” Essentially, this is the only source of up-to-date information. There is no alternative.”

” The report is very comprehensive... and includes data from the beginning of time. There is plenty of factual data that are good for reference or are interesting to a small number of experts.”

” The quality of reports is dependent on the availability of national data and expertise in each particular area. For example, in the area of waste management, assessments are not regularly conducted and data are not regularly collected and analysed.”

Strategic communication

The study shows that in most cases the communication of the assessment messages is either haphazard or non-existent, and that the effects of communication are negligible. If the reach and the use of the assessments are to be improved, communication should be planned as an inherent part of the production cycle, with adequate resources, staff and time dedicated to the effort. In order to improve outreach to sectoral stakeholders outside of the environmental domain, assessments need to be officially communicated inside governments. Sectoral ministries and other authorities are then more likely to disseminate the publications to their subordinated organisations, thus increasing outreach even more.

Assessments are part of the environmental information landscape where they are close to the top of the MDIAK chain.¹ The lower aggregation indicators and the processed and raw data are paramount for the assessments' success. In the modern, increasingly electronic, world it is not only possible, but necessary to strive towards electronic integration of the various information layers, allowing users to access information in the form and with the level of detail they need to make informed decisions, support policies or exercise their environmental rights. Building a truly Shared Environmental Information System as a seamless well-managed world of environmental data open to everyone is the future. The continuously improving, widely used and increasingly useful environmental assessments will occupy an important place in that future.

The conclusions of the current study are forming the basis for the envisaged activities in the framework of the ENI SEIS II East project in the years 2018 – 2020. These cut across the full MDIAK chain and cover the three pillars of SEIS in terms of inter-institutional cooperation, content and infrastructure. Linked to this, the ENI SEIS II East project is oriented towards promoting a more streamlined approach when responding to various reporting obligations under national, regional and/or global processes, and to better linking the assessment and reporting process to policy

¹ To help specify and distinguish between the different types of information needed to support the policy process, the EEA uses the MDIAK framework specifying, in reverse order:

- K** What do we need to Know?
- A** What Assessments are needed?
- I** What Indicators are needed?
- D** What Data are needed at the European level?
- M** What Monitoring is needed to deliver the required data?

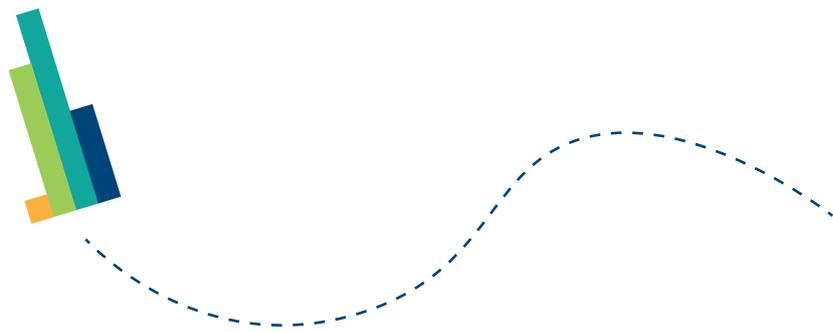
(European Environment Agency. *Europe's environment – An Assessment of Assessments*. Copenhagen, 2011).

Considerations

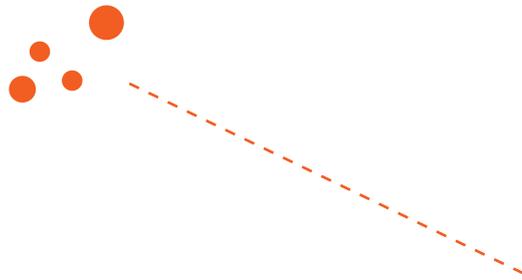
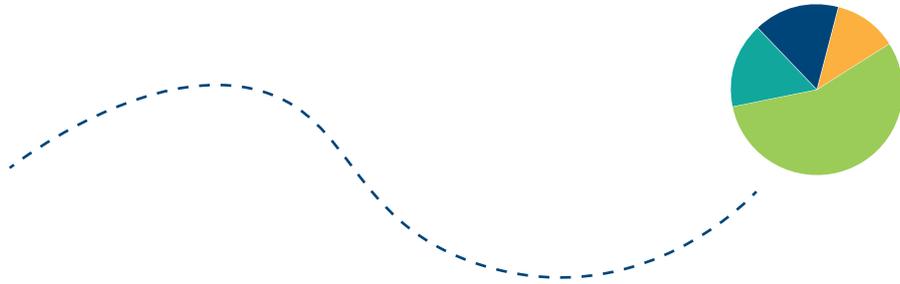
- Take a strategic approach to communicating the messages of the assessments, including the assessment of user needs and expectation through focus group research; preparation and distribution of customised content, messages and communication products; and partnering with mass media outlets and NGOs
- Systematically and officially circulate the published environmental assessment reports to other sectoral authorities, the legislature, regional and municipal governments and subordinated organisations
- Deliver assessment information in languages that are understood by the target audiences (including the systematic translation into national languages of reports to conventions)
- Use the potential of electronic communication to stratify online information so that users can find exactly the level of detail they want
- Continuously monitor the use and outreach of environmental assessments, including the collection of web access statistics for assessment information published online

needs. Given the time frame of the project until 2020, the envisaged activities cover institutional and methodological capacity-building support in line with the EEA and Eionet good practice examples in compiling, distributing and communicating environmental data and assessments to policy-makers and the general public. All this would entail a better and consistent use of the existing information at the national level, and support the efficient environmental governance, well informed decision-making in the countries, and a better response to their reporting obligations under regional and international commitments.

“In the future, all the assessments would ideally be linked to national tasks and targets for achieving the sustainable development goals that were endorsed at the UN General Assembly by leaders of all countries.”



ANNEXES



Annex 1 Average scores and ranges of user responses for all countries

Average share of responses across all countries: ● 0 – 25% ● 25 – 50% ● 50 – 75%

Deviations from the average in selected countries: ▶ one percentage category lower or higher
▶▶ two percentage categories lower or higher

Key indicators of effectiveness

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

Overall quality of the environmental assessment reports

	Low	Medium	High
2.1 How would you evaluate the overall quality of Environmental Assessment reports	●	◀●▶	◀●▶

Quality of information provided in the environmental assessment reports in terms of...

	Low	Medium	High
3.1 Sufficiency	●	◀●▶	◀●▶
3.2 Timeliness	●▶▶	●▶▶	●
3.3 Topical coverage	●	◀●▶	◀●▶
3.4 Reliability	●	●▶	◀●▶
3.5 Independence	●	◀●	◀●
3.6 Communication	●	●▶	●▶

Development of the quality of environmental assessment reports

	Falling	Stable	Improving
4.1 How would you evaluate the development of quality of assessment reports in recent years	●	◀●▶	◀◀●▶

Key indicators of efficiency

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

Did the reports deliver information to ... (1 - completely insignificant role, 5 - very significant role)

	1	2	3	4	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 targets / indicators)	●▶	●	◀●▶	◀●	●▶▶
2.5 help implement policies	●▶	●	◀●▶	◀●▶	●▶
2.6 help evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of environmental policies	●	●▶	◀●	◀●	●▶▶

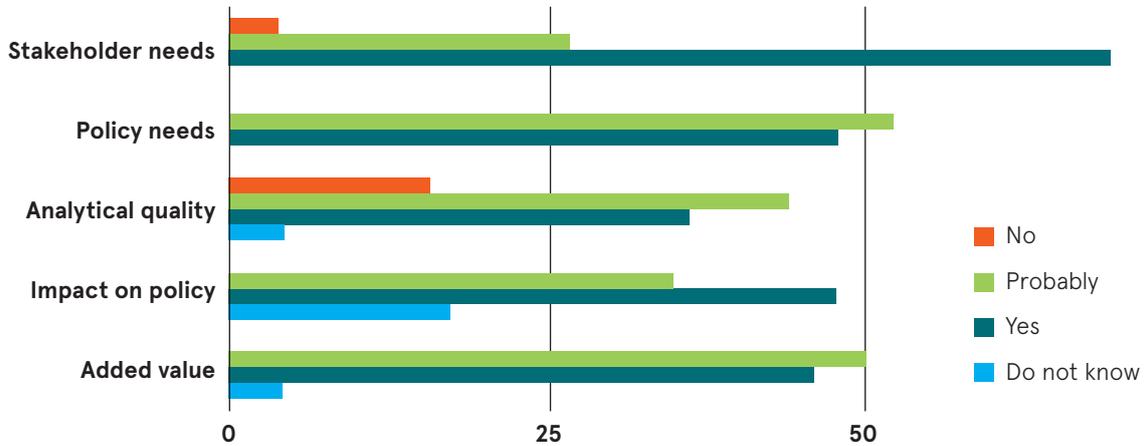
These and similar reports are particularly needed to help improve the country's environmental performance with respect to ... (1 - completely insignificant role, 5 - very significant role)

	1	2	3	4	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	●	●	●▶	◀●▶	●▶

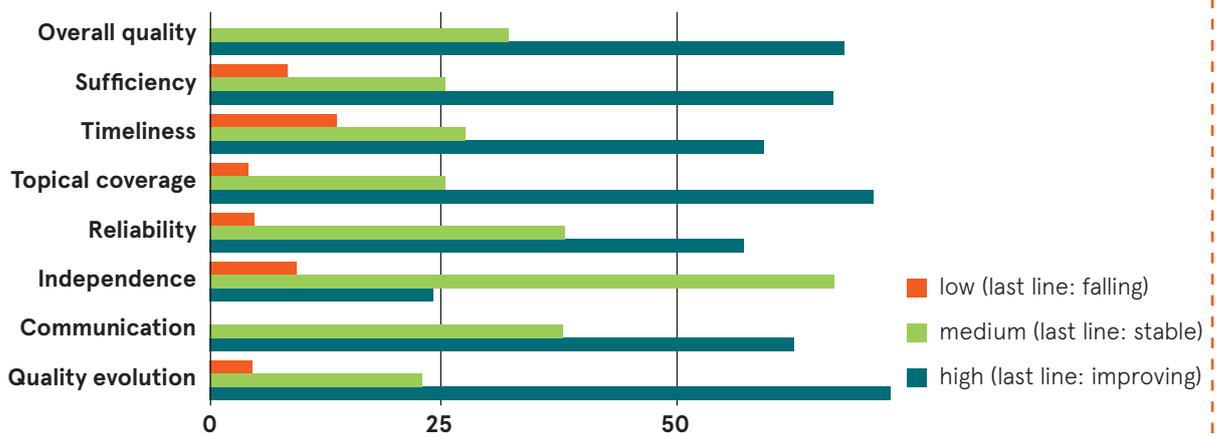
Annex 2 Survey results in the countries (in % of responses)

Belarus

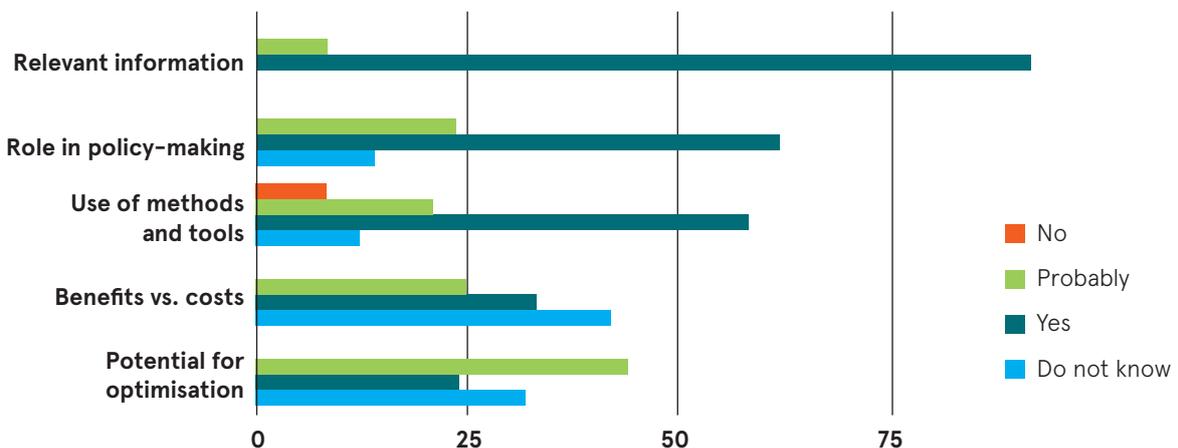
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



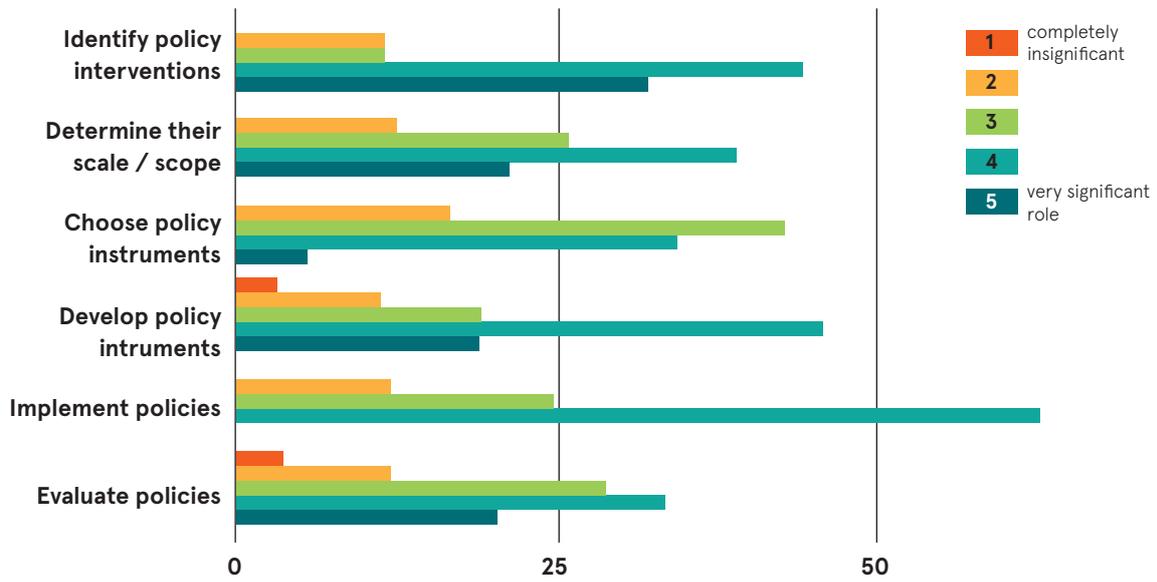
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



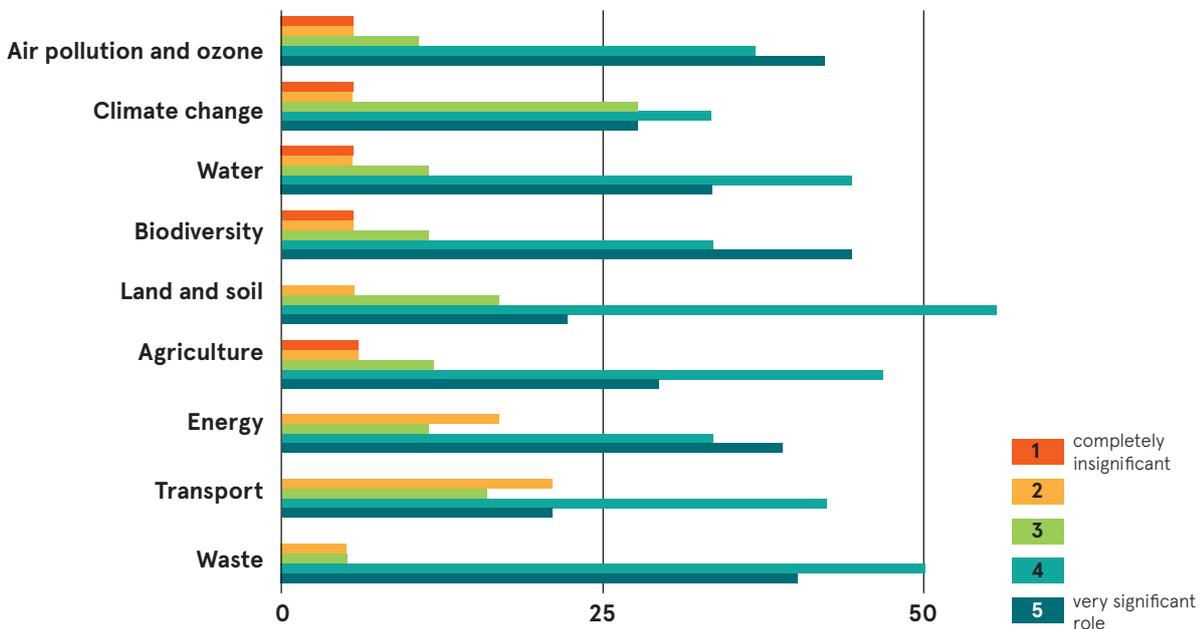
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

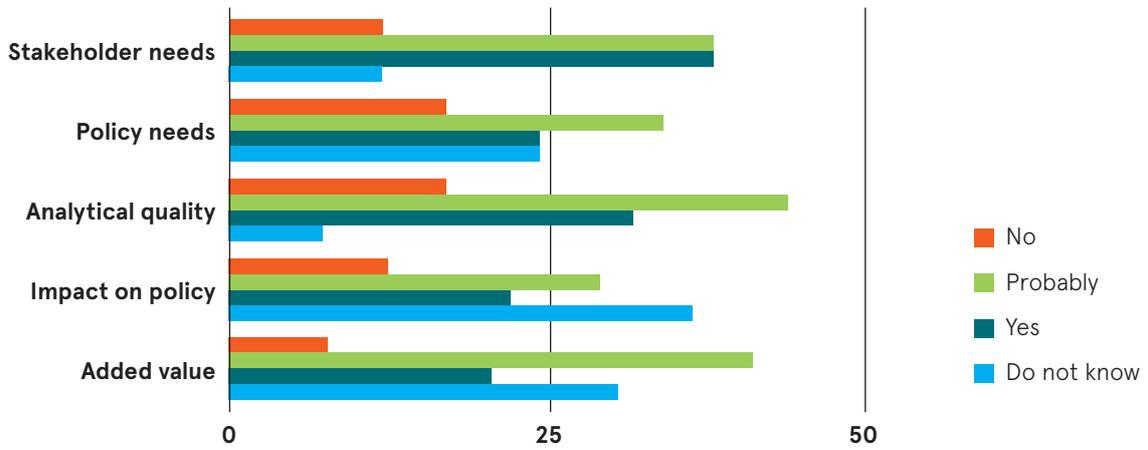


Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)

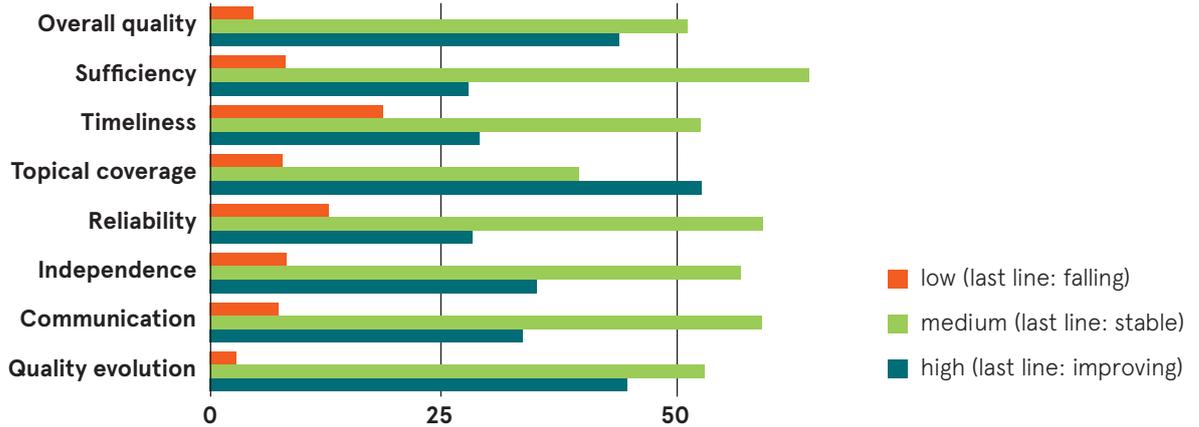


Moldova

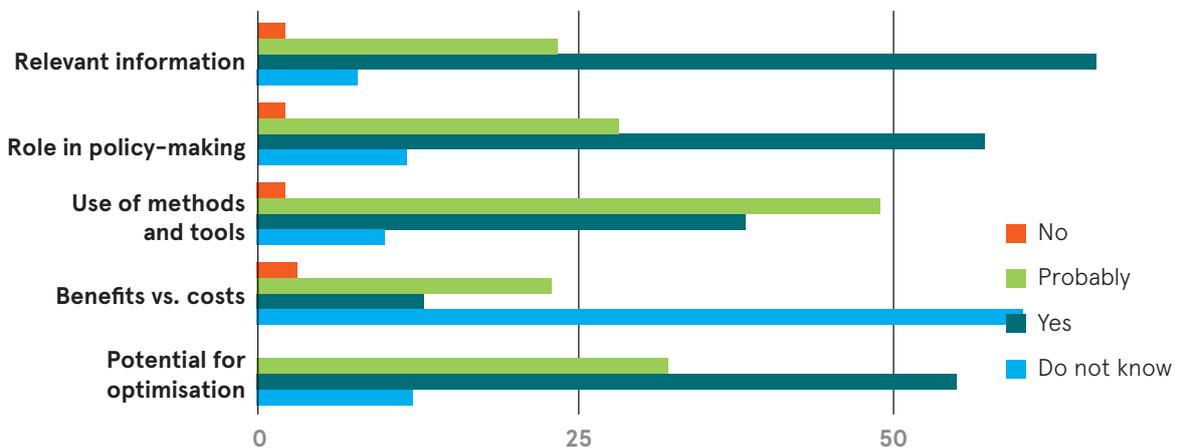
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



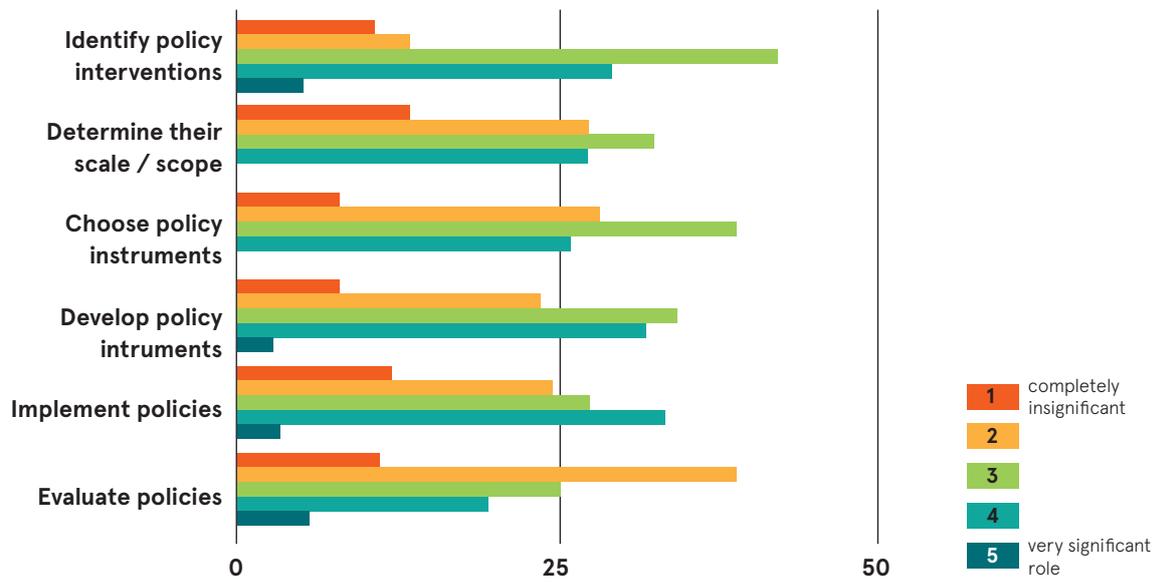
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



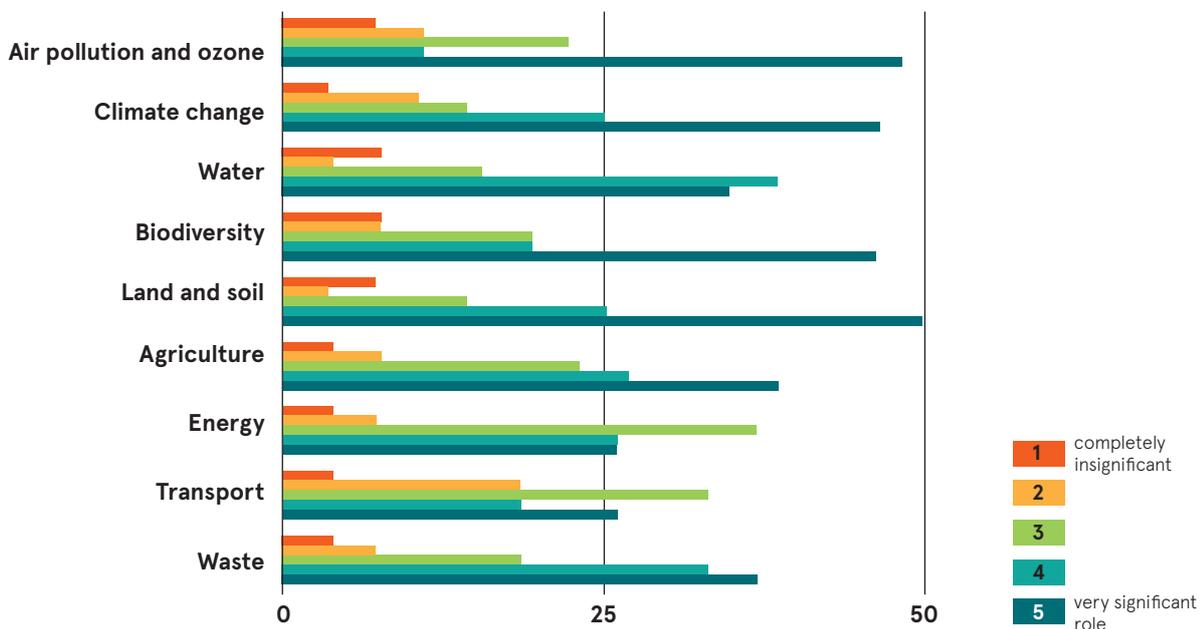
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

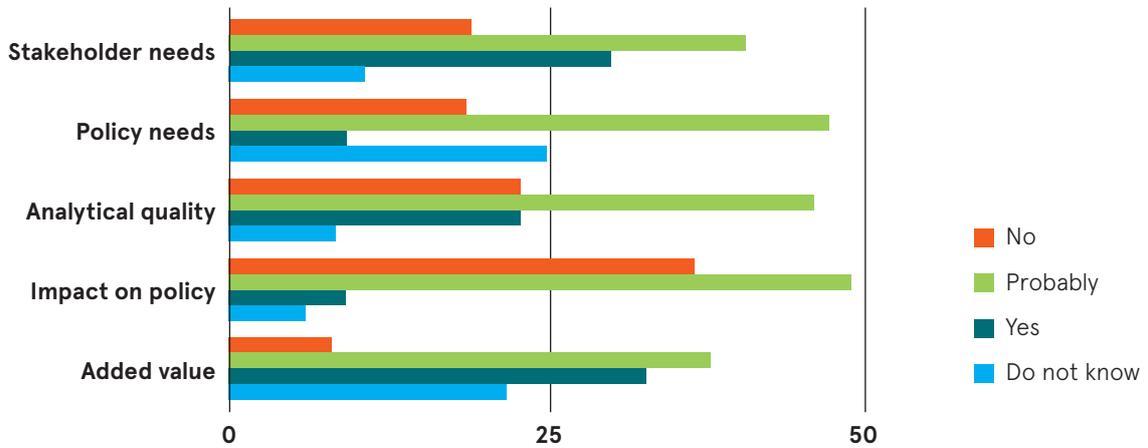


Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)

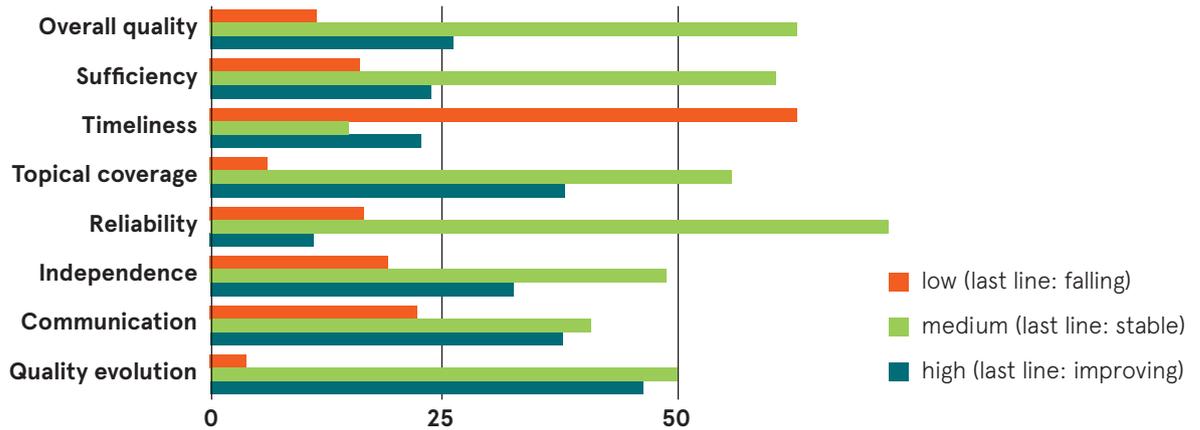


Ukraine

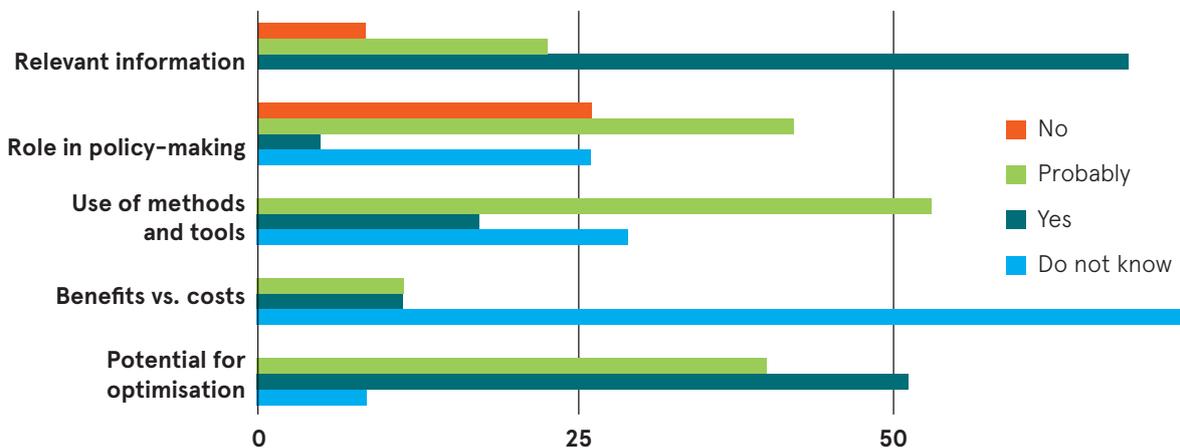
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



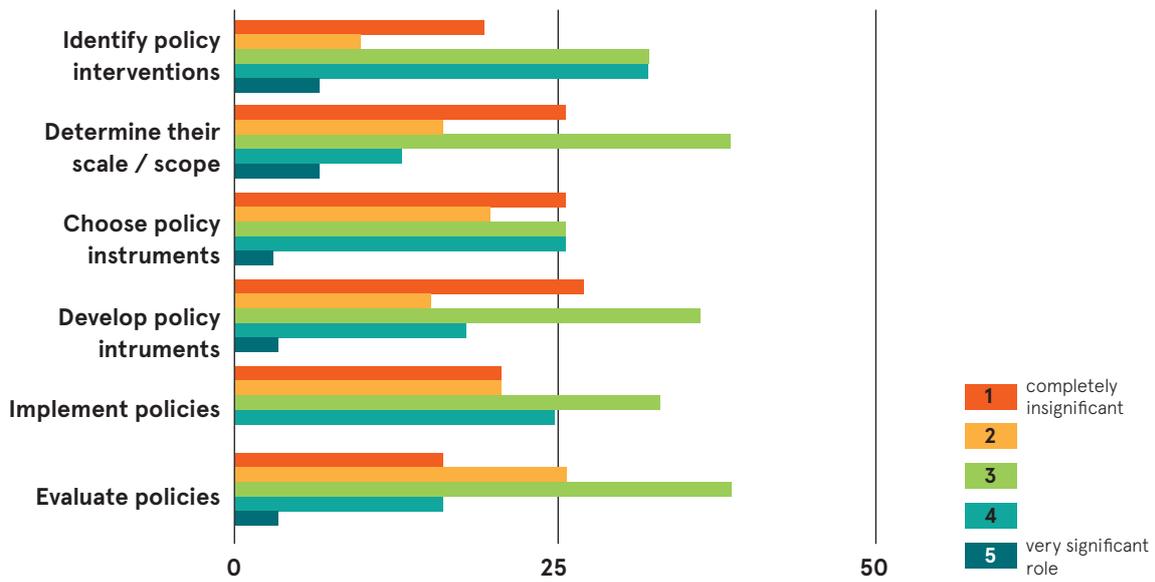
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



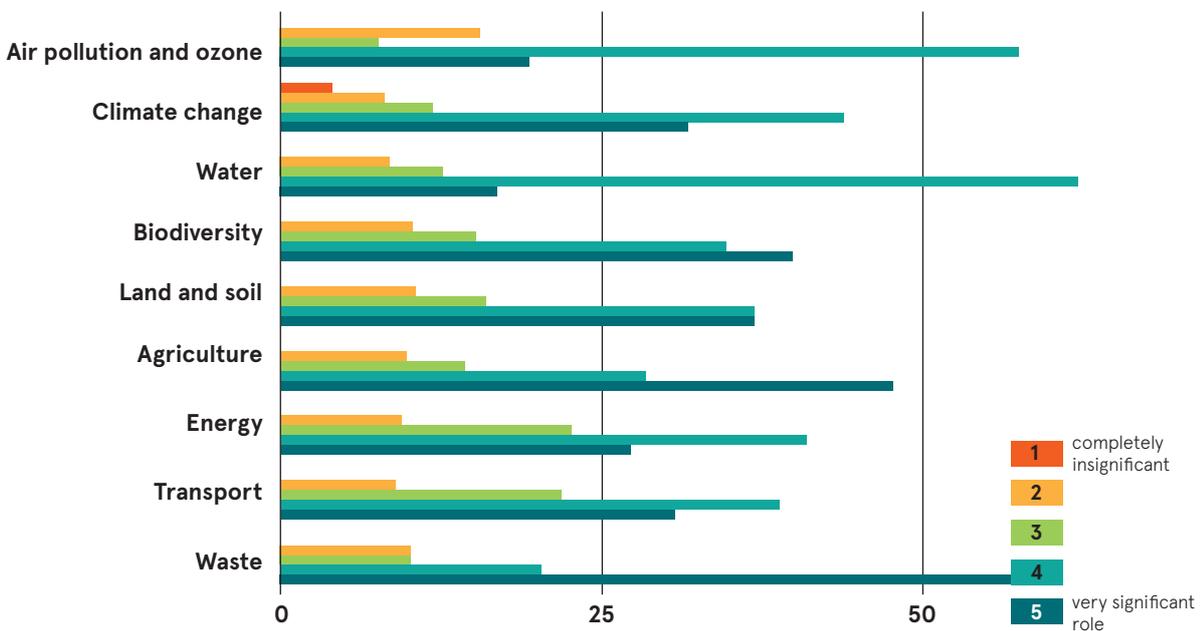
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

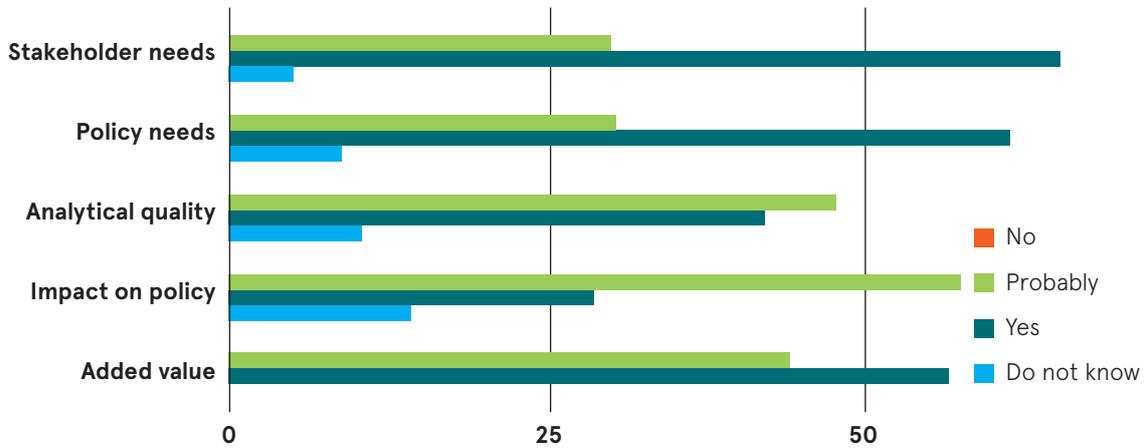


Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)

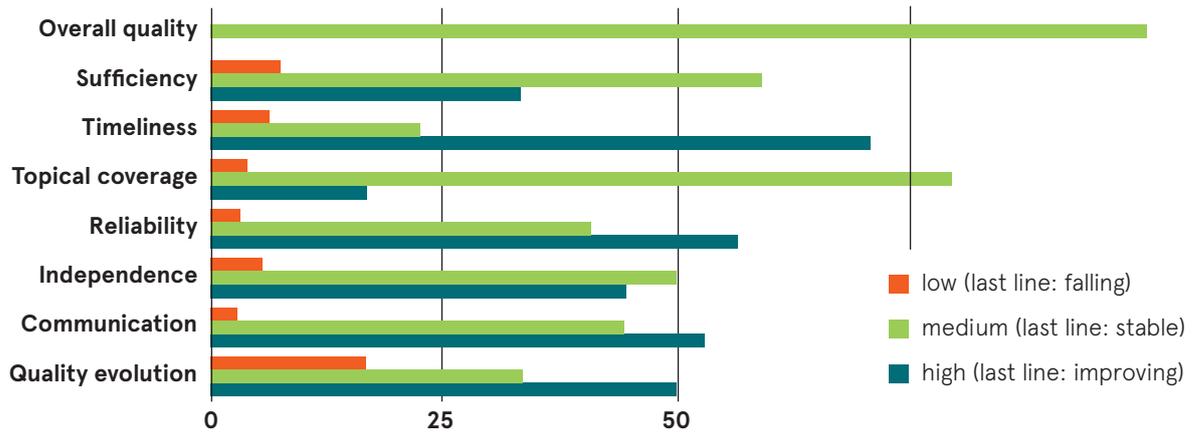


Armenia

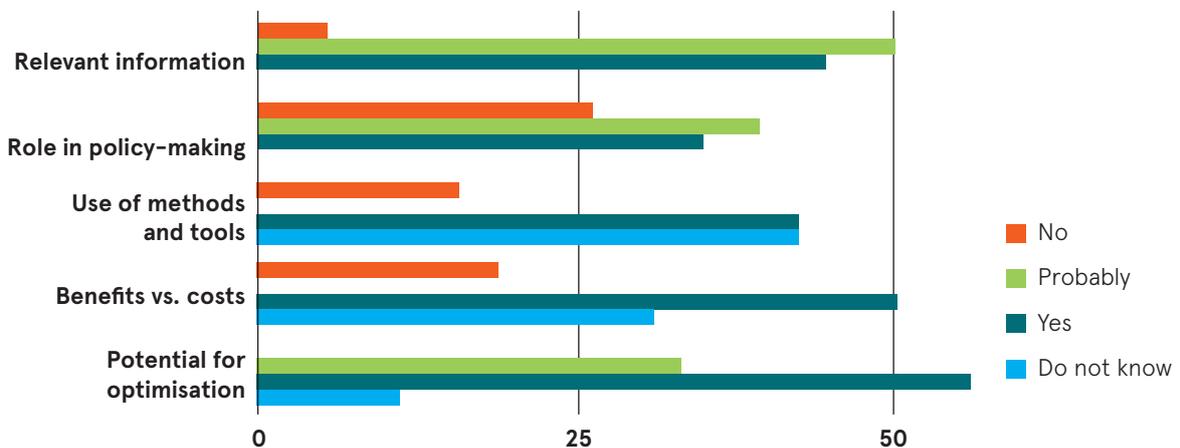
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



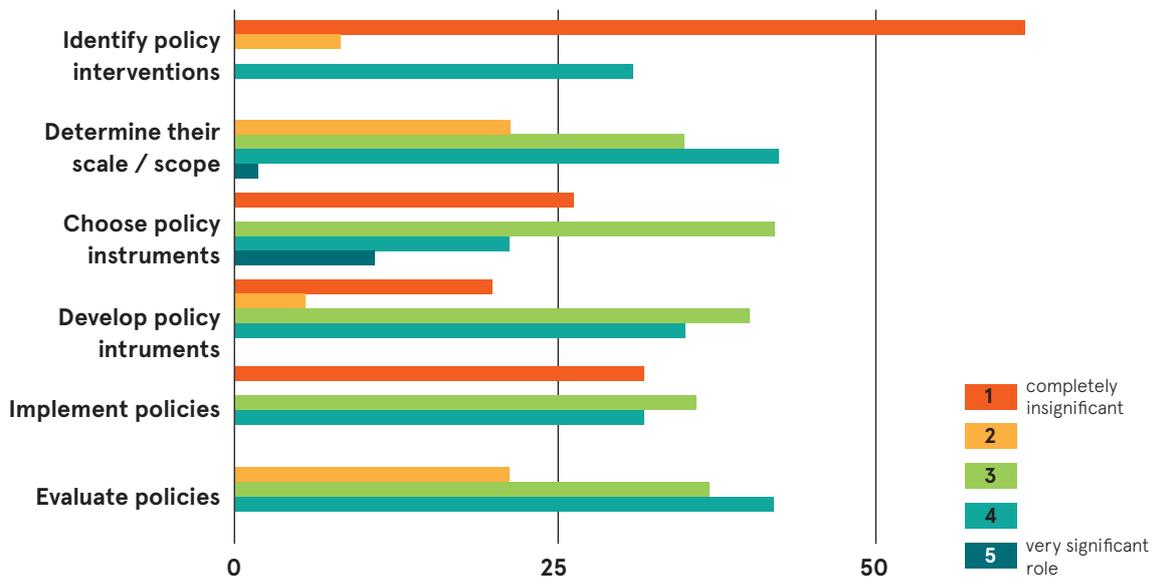
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



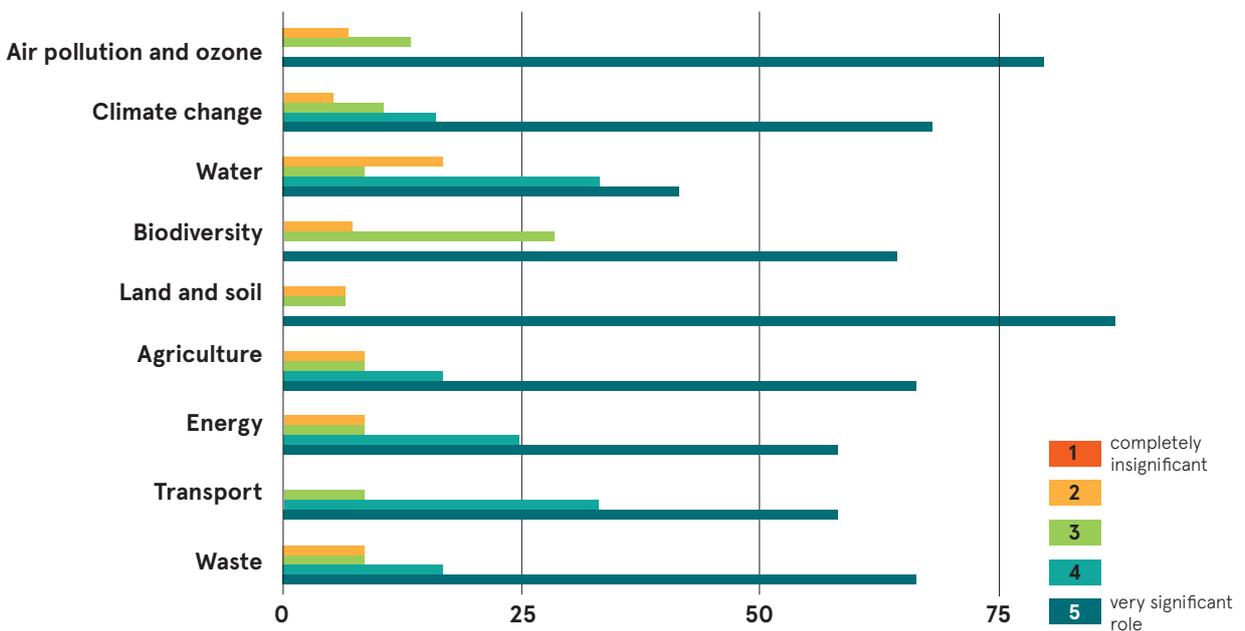
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

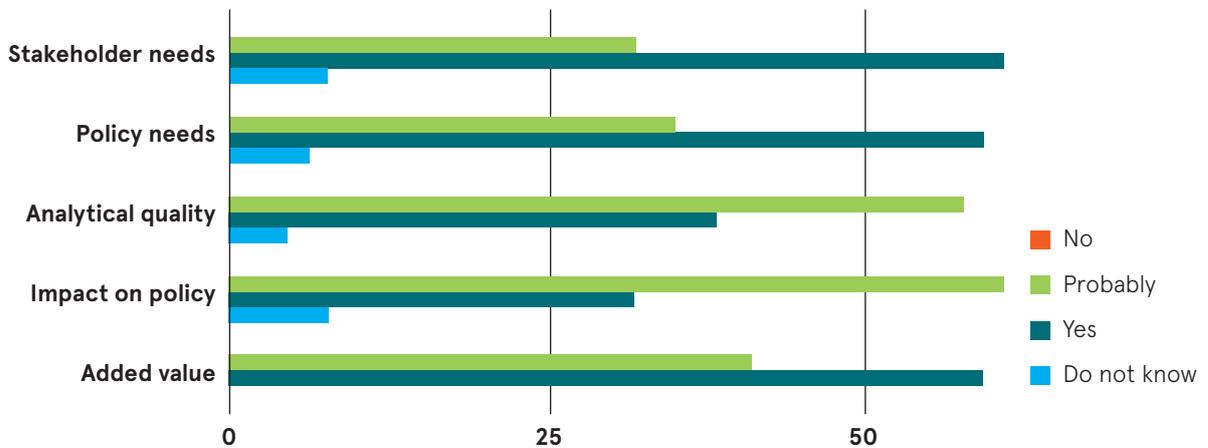


Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)

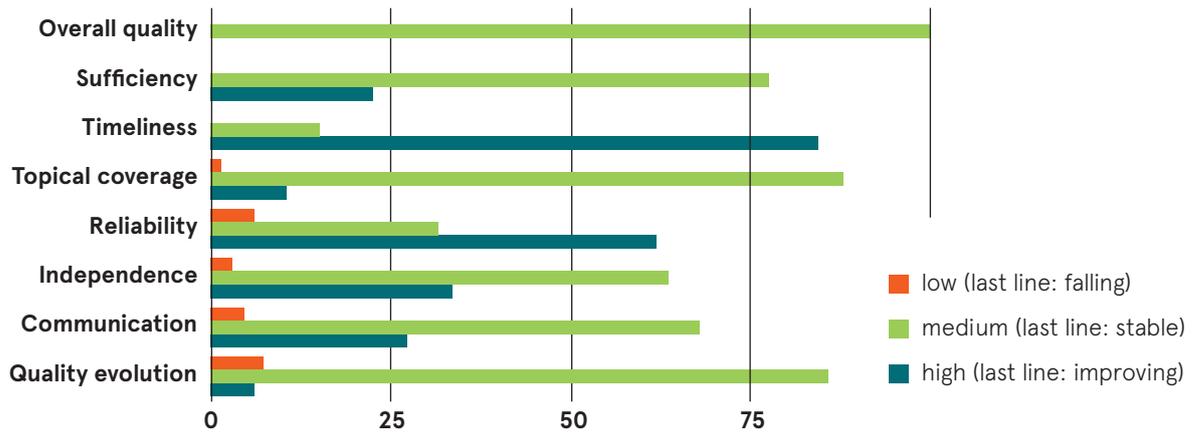


Azerbaijan

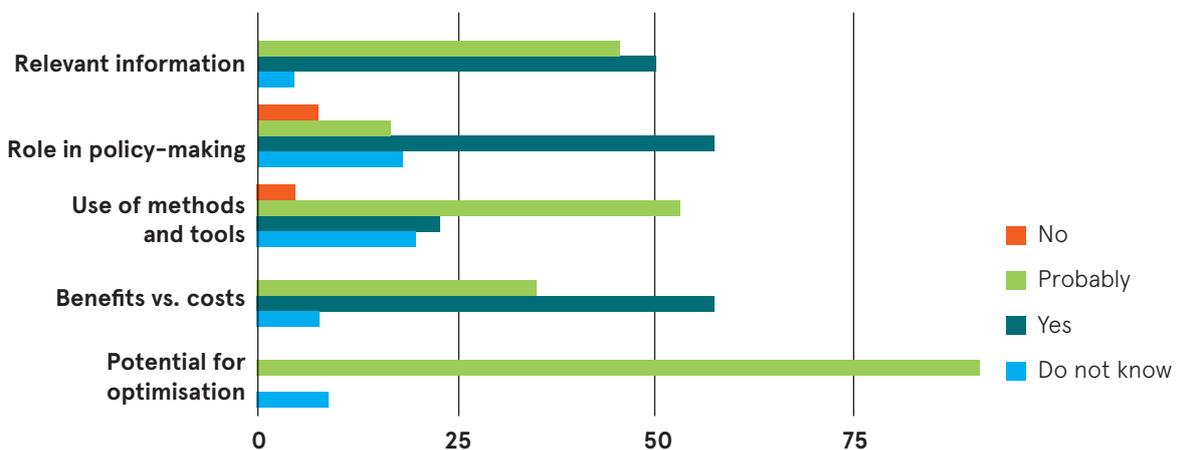
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



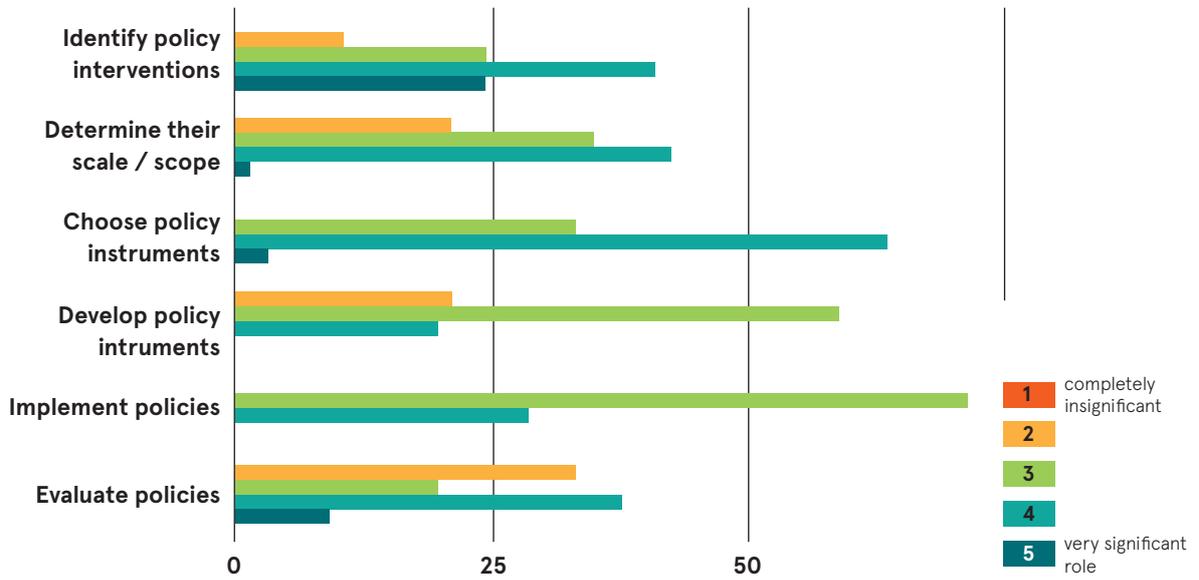
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



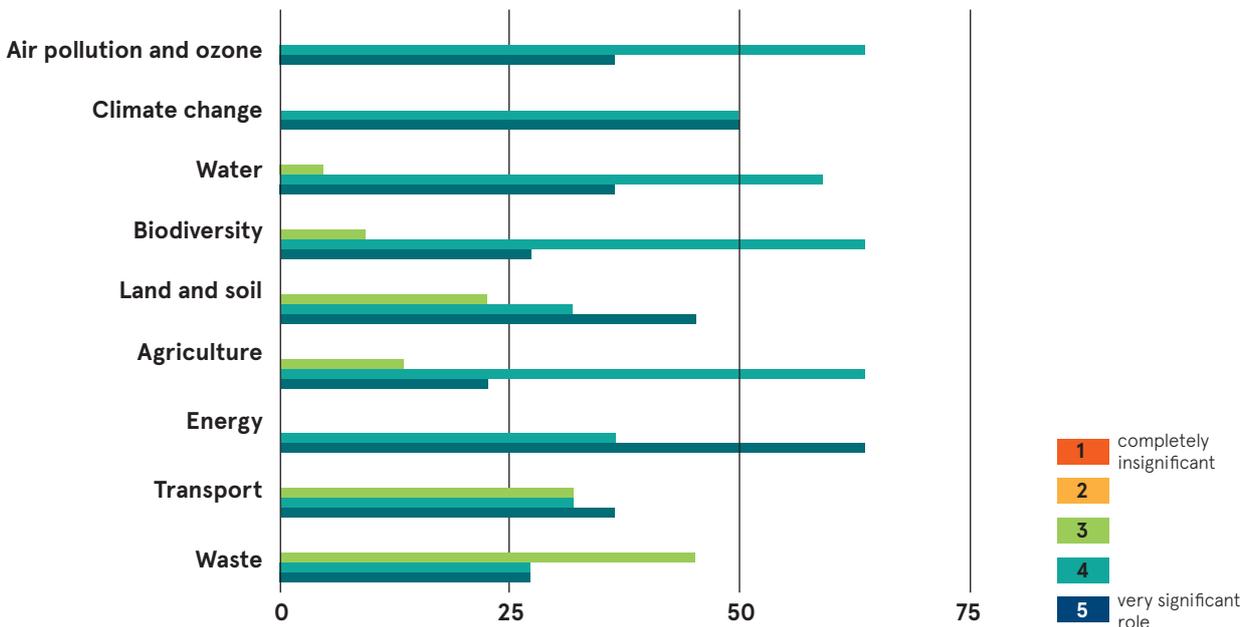
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)

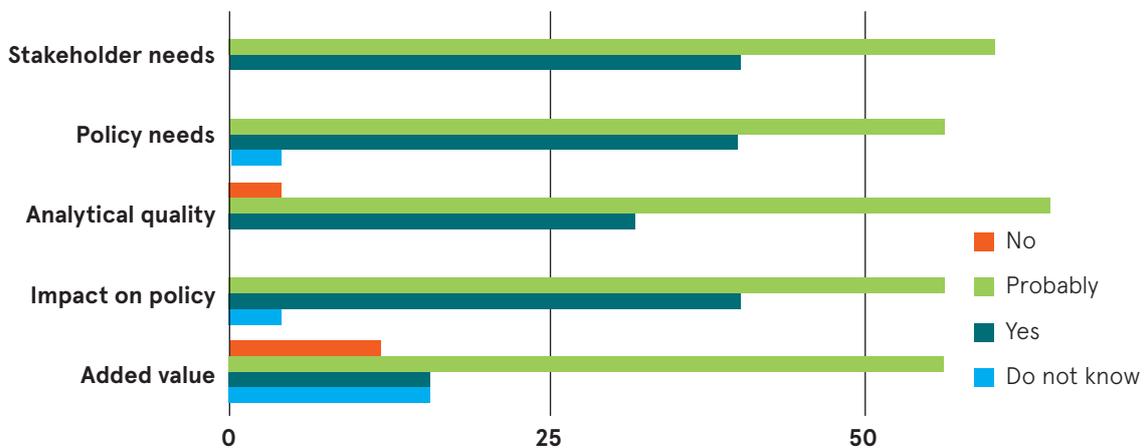


Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)

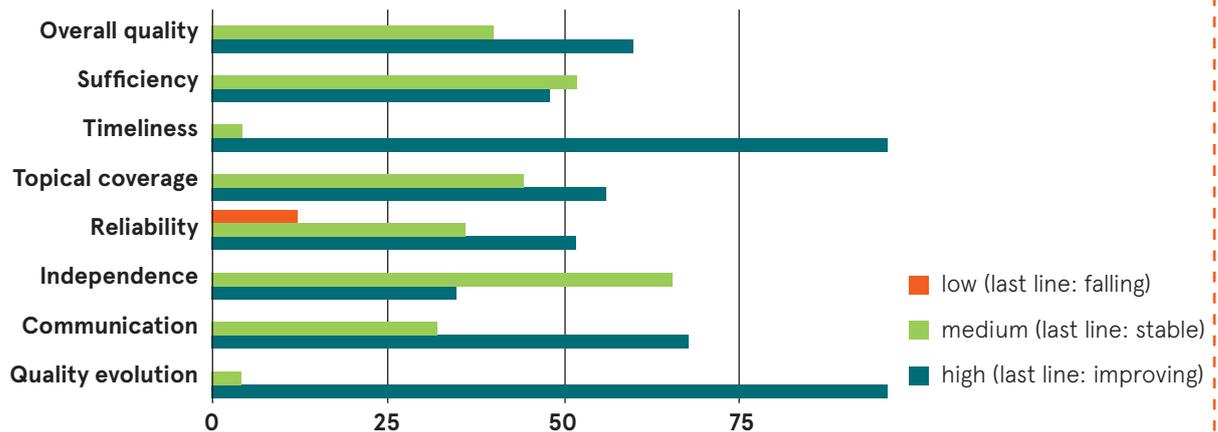


Georgia

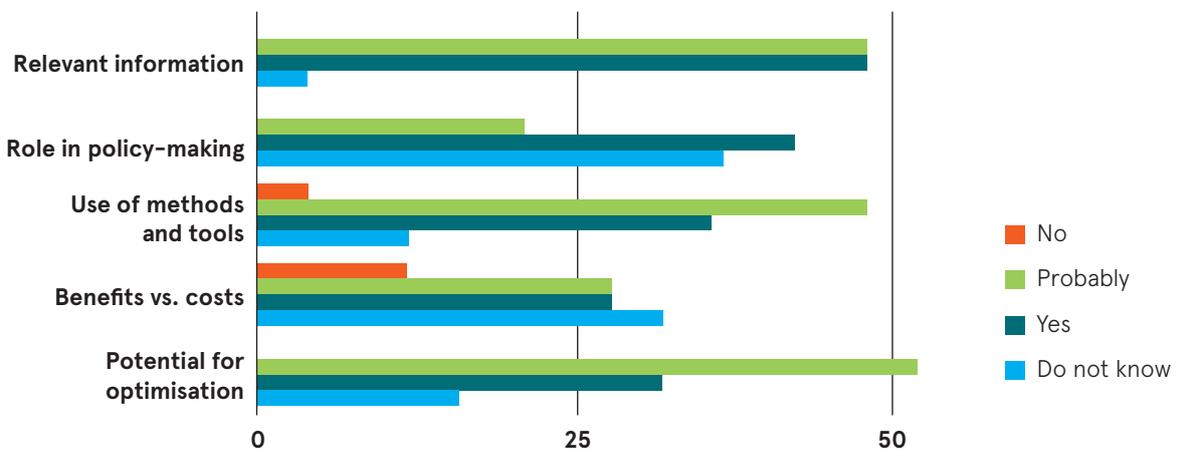
Effectiveness – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



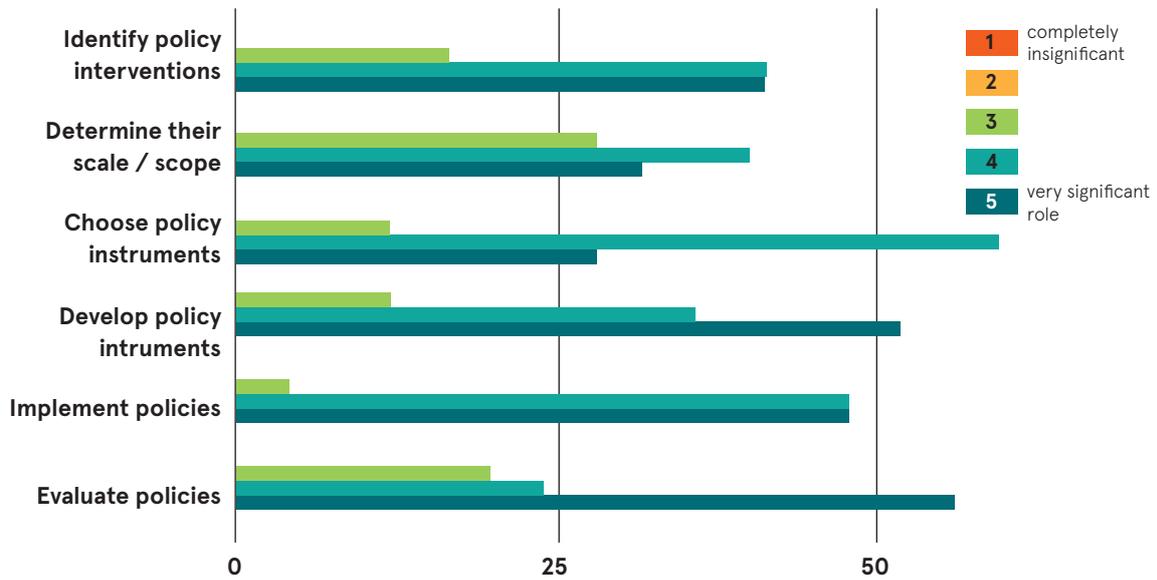
Quality of assessments (average per-country response, %)



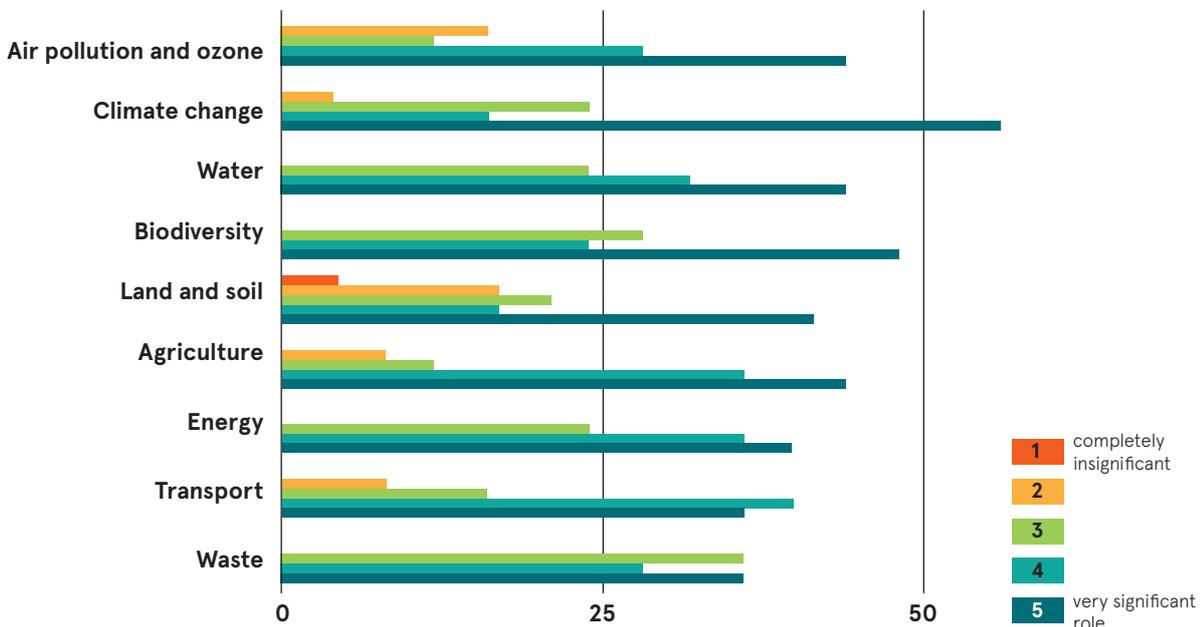
Efficiency – key indicators (average per-country response, %)



Policy relevance and impact (average per-country response, %)



Future demand for assessments (average per-country response, %)



Annex 3 **Generic list of interviewees**

A. Policy-makers

Parliament / environmental issues committee
Prime Minister office (environmental section)
Ministry of the Environment (policy department)
Ministry of Economy (environmental section)
Ministry of Finance (environmental section)
Ministry of Agriculture
Ministry of Transport
Ministry of Energy
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Regional Development / Municipal Economy
Ministry of Emergencies
Municipality (capital)

B. Other stakeholders

Aarhus centre
Academy of Science (research centres, institutes, department of ecology)
University (faculty of ecology)
NGOs focused on environment and climate change
Regional Environmental Centre
Business association

Annex 4 List of reviewed environmental assessments (original titles)

Belarus

Министерство природных ресурсов и охраны окружающей среды Республики Беларусь, Государственное научное учреждение «Институт природопользования Национальной академии наук Беларуси». Национальный доклад о состоянии окружающей среды Республики Беларусь. Национальный доклад. Минск, «Белтаможсервис», 2010

Министерство природных ресурсов и охраны окружающей среды Республики Беларусь, Государственное научно-производственное объединение «Научно-практический центр Национальной академии наук Беларуси по биоресурсам». Конвенция о биологическом разнообразии. Республика Беларусь. Пятый национальный доклад. Минск, 2014

Министерство природных ресурсов и охраны окружающей среды Республики Беларусь, РУП «Бел НИЦ «Экология». Шестое национальное сообщение Республики Беларусь в соответствии с обязательствами по Рамочной конвенции ООН об изменении климата. Минск, 2015

Moldova

Ministerul Mediului al Republicii Moldova, Academia de Științe a Moldovei, Institutul de Ecologie și Geograie. Star-ea mediului în Republica Moldova în 2007–2010 (Raport Național). Chișinău, 2011

[Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Moldova. State-of-the-environment assessment based on the DP-SIR analytical framework. Chisinau, 2015]

United Nations Development Programme, Ministry of Environment. Project “National Biodiversity Planning to Support the Implementation of the CBD. 2011–2020 Strategic Plan in the Republic of Moldova”. Fifth national report on biological diversity. Chișinău, 2013

Ministerul Mediului. Comunicarea Națională Treia Republicii Moldova. Elaborată în cadrul Convenției-cadru a Organizației Națiunilor Unite privind Schimbarea Climei. Chișinău, 2013

Ukraine

Міністерство екології та природних ресурсів України. Національна доповідь про стан навколишнього природного середовища в Україні у 2014 році. Київ 2016

Міністерство екології та природних ресурсів України. Конвенція про біологічне різноманіття. П'ятий національний звіт України. Київ, 2015

Министерство экологии и природных ресурсов Украины, Государственная служба Украины по чрезвычайным ситуациям, Национальная академия наук Украины, Украинский гидрометеорологический институт. VI национальное сообщение Украины по вопросам изменения климата, подготовленное на выполнение статей 4 и 12 Рамочной конвенции ООН об изменении климата и статьи 7 Киотского протокола. Киев, 2012

Armenia

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության բնապահպանության նախարարություն, «2007–2011թթ. Նախարարական զեկույց»: Երևան, 2011թ.

«Կենսաբանական բազմազանության մասին» ՄԱԿ-ի կոնվենցիայի Հայաստանի Հանրապետության հինգերորդ ազգային զեկույց: Երևան, 2014թ.

Հայաստանի Հանրապետության բնապահպանության նախարարություն, Կիմայի փոփոխության մասին երրորդ ազգային հաղորդագրություն ըստ կլիմայի փոփոխության մասին ՄԱԿ-ի շրջանակային կոնվենցիայի: Երևան, 2015թ.

Azerbaijan

Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyi. Azərbaycanca ətraf mühitin vəziyyəti və görülmüş işlərə dair. MƏLUMAT (2008–2012-ci illər). Bakı, 2013

Bioloji Müxtəliflik üzrə Konvensiyaya Azərbaycan Respublikasının Beşinci Milli Hesabatı, Bakı, 2014

Azərbaycan Respublikası Ekologiya və Təbii Sərvətlər Nazirliyi. BMT-NİN iqlim dəyişmələri üzrə çərçivə konvensiyasına Azərbaycanın üçüncü milli məlumatı. Bakı, 2015

Georgia

2010–2013 წლების ბარემოს მდგომარეობის შესახებ პროგნოზული მონაცემები

საქართველოს გარემოსა და ბუნებრივი რესურსების დაცვის სამინისტრო. ბიოლოგიური მრავალფეროვნების შესახებ კონვენციის მეხუთე ეროვნული ანგარიში.

საქართველოს გარემოსა და ბუნებრივი რესურსების დაცვის სამინისტრო. საქართველოს მესამე ეროვნული შეტყობინება გაეროს კლიმატის ცვლილების ჩარჩო კონვენციის მიმართ. 2015

Annex 5 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

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 Does 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 cost 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					

