9.A. Workshop: The contribution of Environmental Impact Assessments to better health

Organised by: EUPHA-HIA, EUPHA-ETH, EUPHA-LAW, EUPHA-ENV
Chair persons: Ben Cave (UK), Odile Mekel (EUPHA-HIA)
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As society builds back from COVID-19 we must ensure that policy decisions about the built environment protect and promote human health. This roundtable is organised by 4 EUPHA sections: Health Impact Assessment; Ethics in Public Health; Law & Public Health; Environment & Health. The objective is to consider ethical, legal and methodological issues raised by the requirement for health to be considered in the EU Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive. This roundtable will cross-examine the advice that EUPHA wrote with the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) to guide health authorities through the EIA process. See https://eupha.org/section_page.php?section_page=200.

We contend that human health in EIA cuts across many aspects of public health and that public health must up its game. The EIA Directive provides a high level of protection to the environment and health on land and at sea. It applies to a wide range of projects in all EU Member States, including those co-financed by the EU through its Cohesion, Agricultural and Fisheries Policies. It applies to projects funded by the financial institutions of the EU which operate globally. The directive explicitly requires human health to be considered and yet gets little input from health authorities. EIA is a forward-looking instrument. EIA provides information to a decision-maker before effects occur. This allows for environment and health to be hard-wired into the design of a project. It places public health at the heart of deliberations about the future of infrastructure and the built environment.

Format: the roundtable will open with an introduction to the process of EIA and the EUPHA/IAIA reference paper. Panellists will then question the speakers. The chairperson will invite questions from all participants. The organisers will generate debate on social media.

Areas of inquiry are provided below:
Ethics: The construction and operation of projects can have good and bad effects on communities, and these effects can go beyond the current generation. What ethical principles should guide the design of these projects? How can an ethical EIA be
 ensured and what is the role for public health? Are there overlapping ethical principles in protecting the environment and protecting health?
Law: What legal instruments can be used to promote, as well as to protect, health? How can EIA be used to ensure that States uphold their legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health for all?
Environment: EIA is involved in granting planning consent for large projects that require resources and which change the environment. Is the argument linking health and environment made strongly enough? What standards are being applied? What is the role of the WHO? How can the strength of the EU Green Deal be utilised?
The panel will conclude by formulating crucial points for improving public health in EIA and lessons for other cross-sectoral work.

Speakers/Panelists:
Els Maeckelberghe
Wenckebach Institute for Medical Education and Training - University Medical Center Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands
Marija Jevtic
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Medicine, Novi Sad, Serbia
Amandine Garde
Law & Non-Communicable Diseases Unit, Liverpool, UK
Sarah Humboldt-Dachroeden
Roskilde University, Copenhagen, Denmark
Filipe Silva
Public Health by Design Limited, Hounslow, UK

Key messages:
- Human health in Environmental Impact Assessment is a legal requirement, it cuts across many aspects of public health and public health must up its game.
- Health in Environmental Impact Assessment provides a test case and a working example of health in other sectors and raises many fascinating questions for the future of public health.