European Environment Agency

SLOVENSKÁ AGENTÚRA ŽIVOTNÉHO PROSTREDIA
SLOVAK ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

COUNTRY BRIEFING

ON STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION IN GEORGIA

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY | SLOVAK ENVIRONMENT AGENCY 2020

Implementation of the Shared Environmental Information System principles and practices in the Eastern Partnership countries (ENI SEIS II East)

This project is funded by the European Union and is implemented by the European Environment Agency

Overall aim and specific objectives of the Country Briefing

The overall aim of the Country Briefing is to provide an overview of and make accessible state of environment information available at the country level.

More specifically, Country Briefing has three objectives:

- To provide interested parties with comparable, accurate and timely information on the environmental status in the six Eastern Partnership Countries of the ENI SEIS II East project that provides useful input into national environmental policy debates in international context.
- To demonstrate country performance and enable the user/reader to compare countries with other Eastern Partnership Countries.
- To share good experience in the field of environmental assessment, information and environmental protection.

Methodological approach to the Country Briefing preparation

The methodological approach is based on the approach used in the preparation of The European environment state and outlook report 2015 (SOER 2015) – Part Countries and regions and is slightly modified in relation to the needs of the ENI SEIS II East project.

The Country Briefings are presented in interactive online versions at the website of the ENI SEIS II East project. Each Country Briefing contains separate sections to address the four main topics:

- **Main themes and sectors addressed in the national State of Environment report**

The purpose of this part is to provide an introduction to the national SOER and understanding of its structure as well as the main topics that are addressed in the report. The text addresses the legal requirement and frequency of the national SOER, methodological basis and use of indicators, structure of the report, overview of main themes addressed in the report and provides links to additional underlying information (e.g. national indicator system, additional reports if relevant, etc.). Suggested length: up to 250 words.

- **Key findings of the State of Environment report/ Key finding of the state of the environment**

The purpose of this part is to provide brief overview of the state of the environment in the country. It provides a summary of the key messages as well as key findings within the topics addressed in the latest national SOE report. Up-to-date data and information from other relevant official sources are also used. Suggested length: up to 800 words.

- **Main policy responses to key environmental challenges and concerns**

The purpose of this part is to reflect on the state of the environment in the wider national context, focusing on the main challenges, environmental concerns and existing policies addressing these challenges/concerns in the country. In this part there are also highlighted policy responses to improve the state of the environment. Suggested length: up to 500 words.

- **Country specific issues**

The purpose of this part is to provide an opportunity to highlight country specific issues addressed in the SOE report or in relevant adopted policies, including emerging issues and how countries are dealing with them and, innovative policies supporting long term transition towards a more sustainable society in the country. The aim is to help to identify interesting developments and innovative approaches that could be an interest for other Eastern Partnership Countries. This includes the environmental political agenda; green economy, forward looking information and scenarios, regional issues etc. The suggestions mentioned below are based on the discussions during the country visit. Suggested length: up to 500 words.

Main themes and sectors addressed in the national State of Environment Report (SOER)

The SOER of Georgia is published every four years by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (Ministry) in accordance with the Article 14 of the Law on Environmental Protection of Georgia. The SOER 2007-2009 was prepared and published with the support of the EU, which is available in both Georgian and English[1]. The next SOER 2010-2013[2] was prepared and published with the financial support of GIZ and USAID. It is available only in Georgian. The new SOER 2014-2017, developed again with the financial support from GIZ and USAID, was finalized in 2019 and is available in both Georgian and English languages[3].

This document provides a comprehensive assessment of the state of the elements of the environment in 2014-2017, the challenges and response mechanisms, the impact of economic sectors on the ecosystem and environmental governance in the country. Due to topicality of certain environmental issues, the report also includes data and information on environmental governance for 2018-2019.

Document covers the following areas:

- Social-Economic Factors Affecting the Environment;
- Ambient Air;
- Water Resources;
- Land Resources and Soils;
- Mineral Resources;
- Biodiversity;
- Climate Change;
- Natural Disasters;
- Waste;
- Chemicals;
- Ionizing Radiation;
- Hunting and Fishery;
- Agriculture and Forest Use;
- Transport;
- Industry and Energy;
- Environmental Policy and Planning;
- Environmental Regulation and Control;
- Environmental Research, Education and Awareness Raising.

Key findings of the State of Environment report

The increase in the number of households and the high concentration of urban population, as well as the unsustainable use of natural resources and production, are major challenges for most countries in terms of adverse environmental impacts. Significant impacts are also being made by intensive infrastructure construction, both in terms of living environment and ecosystems change. Georgia is not an exception in this case.

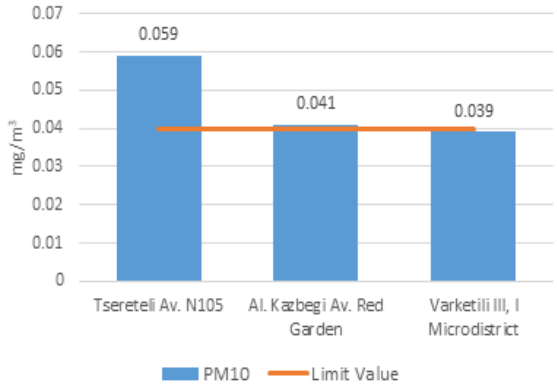
[1] *National Report on the State of the Environment of Georgia 2007-2009*
[2] *National Report on the State of the Environment in Georgia 2010-2013*
[3] *National Report on the State of the Environment of Georgia 2014-2017*

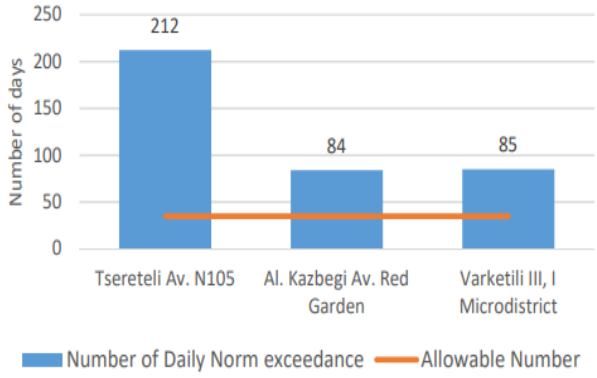
Ambient air

The problem of ambient air pollution in Georgia is found in the largest cities of the country, as well as in large industrial sites or industrial zones. Almost everywhere except Zestaponi municipality, the problematic pollutants are fine particulate matter (PM_{10}) and nitrogen dioxide. Since 2014, emissions of solid particles (PM_{10} and $PM_{2.5}$), volatile organic compounds (VOC), carbon monoxide (CO) and ammonia (NH_3) have been reduced and emissions of nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) are increasing, mainly due to the emission of the pollutant from the motor transport sector. In recent years, along with the increase in the consumption of coal in the industrial sector, emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO_2) have increased significantly.

One of the key components of an ambient air quality assessment system is a quality monitoring system. Ambient air quality monitoring in Georgia is carried out by the LEPL National Environmental Agency (NEA) of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia (MEPA). In the period 2014-2017 the country gradually replaced the outdated air quality assessment system with the modern European system. In particular, the old methodology and standards have been changed along with the replacement of old non-automatic stations with modern automatic stations.

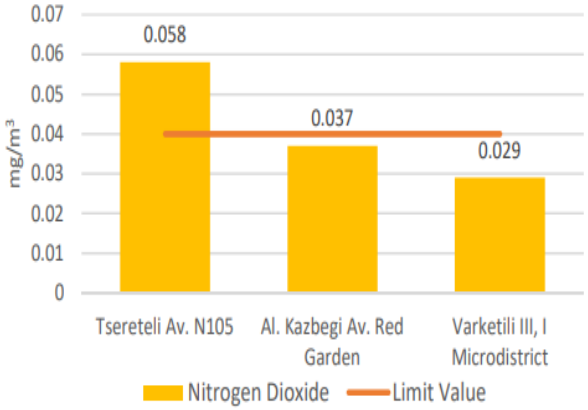
Average annual concentration and number of exceedance of PM10 daily limit values in 2017





Source: LEPL National Environmental Agency, air.gov.ge

Average concentration of nitrogen dioxide in 2017



Source: LEPL National Environmental Agency, air.gov.ge

Water resources

In Georgia, majority of rivers meet the water quality standards. There are however, several rivers, where the water pollution problems persist regularly or periodically. Contamination of water bodies with ammonia nitrogen is the most widely spread water quality issue in Georgia. Based on the monitoring results, the

concentration of ammonia nitrogen consistently exceeds the Maximum Allowable Concentration (MAC) in 11 rivers and 4 lakes. High pollution level with heavy metals is a problem in the Kazretula and Mashavera rivers of the Caspian Sea basin. Concentrations of heavy metals here exceed the MAC values. In the Black Sea basin, in the river Kvirila, water contamination with manganese is present. Chemical and microbiologic parameters of monitored groundwater are within the norm. Quality of the Black Sea water can be assessed as mostly good in respect to the eutrophication status. Nevertheless, there are two areas – Anaklia and Poti Port surroundings, where the moderately high level of chlorophyll was observed.

Land resources and soil

In Georgia, degradation is caused by both natural and anthropogenic factors. Recently there has been a change in climate and a decrease in precipitation, especially in eastern Georgia. The use of man-made unsustainable agricultural practices, deforestation, forest fires, disruption of irrigation systems, and uncontrolled use of fertilizers and chemicals have further enhanced soil degradation and reduced soil fertility. It is necessary to develop a sustainable land management policy and legislative framework that will ensure the implementation of the principles of sustainable land use in the country. Due to Georgia‘s climate-relief features and geodynamic processes, erosion of soils and soils in Georgia is quite extensive. 35% of agricultural land is degraded. The most common form of land degradation in Georgia is soil erosion. According to the heavy metal content, the soil quality in Georgia is satisfactory. Nonetheless, heavy metal contamination is found near industrial cities and mining sites.

Biodiversity

Due to the diversity of species and habitats, the high level of endemism and the spread of ecosystems of global importance, Georgia is on the priority list of nature conservation. However, due to the significant threats to biodiversity, Georgia is also part of the world‘s biodiversity hotspots.

Development of a network of protected areas is of particular importance for the conservation of Georgia‘s unique biodiversity and its endangered species of flora and fauna. A modern network of protected areas has been established in Georgia since the 90s of the last century, which today comprises 14 nature reserves, 12 national parks, 20 nature reserves, 40 nature monuments and 1 protected landscapes. In 2014-2019, compared to 2013, the area of protected areas increased by about 27.9% to 666 107 ha, which is 9.56% of the total area of the country. In order to ensure effective management of protected areas, a Management Plan for 9 Protected Areas was approved in 2014-2017.

Main policy responses to key environmental challenges and concerns

Environmental pollution and climate change have been recognized as major threats to Georgia’s long-term socioeconomic development. Social-Economic Development **Strategy of Georgia “GEORGIA 2020”**[4] aims to promote rational use of natural resources, ensure environmental safety and sustainability and prevent natural disasters along with efforts to efficient and inclusive economic growth.

In 2014 Georgia signed the **Association Agreement (AA)**[5] with EU that covers almost all environmental directions and is a main source of reforms for the country.

Georgia has made great progress in developing strategic environmental policies:

The Third National Environmental Action Programme of Georgia 2017-2021 (NEAP-3) is a main strategic document in the field of environment and natural resources protection that identifies priorities, strategic objectives and long-term goals of Georgia as well as sets targets and activities required to improve the state of the environment.

[4] *Strategy of Georgia “GEORGIA 2020”*
[5] *Association Agenda*

Government of Georgia is fully committed to the implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**. At this stage, the Ministry has taken responsibility to implement 8 targets of 4 SDGs in the field of environment.

Georgia has committed under the **Batumi Initiative on Green Economy (BIG-E)** to elaborate Green Growth Strategy, develop Education for Sustainable Development Strategy and Action Plan, Promote Greening SMEs and Resource Efficient Production and Consumption and develop Extended Producer Responsibility Policy in Georgia.

Ambient air

State Program on "Enabling activities to abate ambient air pollution in Tbilisi" 2017-2020 was approved in 2017. While the Program aims at improving air quality in Tbilisi, a number of measures go beyond the capital and are nationwide.

Georgia also took 7 commitments under **Batumi Action for Cleaner Air (BACA)**.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Georgia, with its **Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC)**[6], made a commitment to reduce GHG emissions by 15% unconditionally and up to 25% in a conditional manner by 2030. Georgia became a party to the Paris Agreement in 2017 and now is in the process to revise INDC.

Waste

National Waste Management Strategy and **National Waste Management Action Plan 2016-2020**[7] along with the Law on Waste Management Code (2015) is a basis for waste management reform in the country.

Land

Second National Action Programme to Combat Desertification 2015-2022[8] is the main national strategic document in the field of desertification/land degradation.

Biodiversity

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2014-2020[9] sets 21 national targets according the provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and includes respective activities aiming at preservation of the values of biodiversity in Georgia.

In 2013, the Parliament of Georgia approved the main policy document in the forestry sector - the **National Forest Concept for Georgia**[10], which defines the key principles and sets the priority directions to establish European model of sustainable forest management in Georgia.

Based on European principles of forest management the new Forest Code is developed and submitted to the Parliament as of 2019 (it was adopted by the Parliament in May, 2020). The new Forest Code is a legal basis for the introduction of sustainable forest management practices in Georgia.

6 *Intended Nationally Determined Contribution of Georgia*
7 *The National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and an Action Plan 2016-2020*
8 *Second National Action Programme to Combat Desertification 2015 – 2022*
9 *National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of Georgia 2014 – 2020*
10 *National Forest Concept of Georgia*

Country specific issues

The permitting system should be emphasized among the key reforms in the field of environmental governance in Georgia.

The new law - Environmental Assessment Code was adopted on June 1, 2017. The Code significantly improved environmental governance and ensured higher degree of public participation not only in planning but also in decision-making processes, and thus contributed to the better implementation of the national and international obligations. The Code established Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) system increasing list of activities subject to EIA, simplifying the procedures and saving the time for developer. Developer is no longer required to conduct public discussion. It is the state instead.

The Code also established Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) system that envisages integration of environmental and human health related aspects in strategic planning and improvement of transboundary cooperation.

Substantial part of the Code has been enacted since January 1, 2018.

As for the future plans related to the permitting reform, Georgia is going to gradually establish integrated pollution prevention and control (IPPC) system based on one stop shop principle. The IPPC approach implies the application of modern environmental management principles like best available techniques (BAT) and emission limit values (ELV). For this purpose, the draft Law on Industrial Emissions has been developed.

While executing the new Environmental Assessment Code in the framework of the above-mentioned environmental legislation reform, Georgia has developed the draft Law on Environmental Liability that will establish a new system of environmental liability and legal conditions for the prevention and remediation of significant environmental damage in accordance with the Polluter Pays Principle.