

## Step 2. Scoping the assessment

Once it has been decided to conduct a sustainability impact assessment of a proposed policy, scoping is needed to determine the appropriate extent and depth of the assessment. An extensive assessment of every policy proposal would be a time-consuming and resource-intensive exercise. The depth of analysis and resources used should be proportionate to the significance of the policy, taking into account available information, time, staff and financial resources.

For example, the European Commission requests a “proportionate analysis” to match the depth and scope of the impact assessment to the significance, political and legal nature, and sectoral particularities of the policy proposal. In-depth assessments are required for new regulatory proposals in areas previously left to the Member States, while more limited analyses are needed for revisions of existing legislation (EC, 2005b).

Scoping is also used to identify the most important issues for assessment and the best ways to address them. It should set the boundaries of the impacts to be considered to ensure a focus on the most significant effects, while excluding those elements where impacts are perceived to be negligible. This can be based on the results of the screening in Step One. In addition to the content of the assessment, scoping should identify the relevant criteria and indicators for sustainability adapted to the initiative, timeframe, methods and participants (see Section 6.1). This exercise can be summarised by the following questions: “Who will do what, for what purpose, when, how and with what resources?”

Similar tools can be used for both screening and scoping (e.g. checklists, matrices, literature surveys). This reduces the time devoted to this step and helps to maintain continuity and consistency within the SIA. In the Belgian methodology, three categories of issues are addressed in the scoping process: procedural, substantive and methodological (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. **Scoping elements in Belgian SIAs**

Scoping area	Examples of scoping questions
1. Procedural	Who will conduct and oversee the assessment? What financial resources are available? What human resources are available? Which decision-makers need to be engaged? Which specialists and expertise could usefully be involved? Which stakeholders should participate at what stages? What is the timing of the assessment?
2. Substantive	What is the purpose of the assessment? What are the goals and target groups of the policy? Which potential impacts should be the focus of the assessment? Which criteria will be used to assess the significance of the impacts? How extensive should the assessment be? Are there potential unintended side effects which warrant attention? What is the time horizon for the assessment?
3. Methodological	What data sources and information are available? Which methods will serve the purpose of the assessment? What set of tools should be considered? How will the assessment process be monitored and evaluated?

*Source:* Adapted from Bauler, T. and Wäktare, M. (2006), “Towards a Screening Mechanism for SIA: Process and Content Issues Related to the Federal Belgian Case”, ULB-IGEAT, Brussels.