European Union Network for the
Implementation and Enforcement
of Environmental Law

IMPEL NPRI

National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)

Phase II

IMPEL Project 2020/16

Version 15 May   2021

Introduction to IMPEL

The European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) is an international non-profit association of the environmental authorities of the EU Member States, acceding and candidate countries of the European Union and EEA countries. The association is registered in Belgium and its legal seat is in Bruxelles, Belgium.

IMPEL was set up in 1992 as an informal Network of European regulators and authorities concerned with the implementation and enforcement of environmental law. The Network's objective is to create the necessary impetus in the European Community to make progress on ensuring a more effective application of environmental legislation. The core of the IMPEL activities concerns awareness raising, capacity building and exchange of information and experiences on implementation, enforcement and international enforcement collaboration as well as promoting and supporting the practicability and enforceability of European environmental legislation.

During the previous years IMPEL has developed into a considerable, widely known organisation, being mentioned in a number of EU legislative and policy documents, e.g. the 6th Environment Action Programme and the Recommendation on Minimum Criteria for Environmental Inspections.

The expertise and experience of the participants within IMPEL make the network uniquely qualified to work on both technical and regulatory aspects of EU environmental legislation.

Information on the IMPEL Network is also available through its website at:

www.impel.eu

Title report:	Number report:
National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI), Phase 2, Release 02	Project Number (release) 2020/16 (02)
Project manager: Pieter-Jan Van Zanten (NL), Fabio Carella (IT), Giuseppe Sgorbati (IT)	**Report adopted at IMPEL General Assembly:** [......]
Authors: Pieter-Jan Van Zanten (NL), Fabio Carella (IT), Giuseppe Sgorbati (IT)	**Number of pages:** 18 Report: 18 Annexes: at the links at pg. 17 of this report (The annexes are the deliverables of this project)

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Disclaimer:

This report is the result of a project within the IMPEL network. The content does not necessarily represent the view of the national administrations.

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1. Executive summary

Objective NPRI Project

The general objective of the NPRI project is to develop a systematic approach for a National Peer Review Initiative, based on flexibility and specific country and organisational needs. The aim of the project is:

- To develop a Peer Review methodology and guidance that supports increase of capabilities, at various levels (local, regional, national and organisational), and facilitates homogeneity and harmonisation of performance of authorities in environmental matters, such as implementation, inspection, permitting, planning, to share good practices and to foster all the processes in order to contribute to a better harmonised implementation of environmental legislation;

- To set the basis for a methodology when applied supports a better understanding of the common needs within competent authorities (e.g.: training, common rules, documents, type of instruments and technical support etc.);

- To develop a support mechanism and guidance to implement the NPRI methodology at a national scale through a national network of contact points;

- To design an approach on facilitating and delivering adequate support to implement the outcomes of Peer Review missions.

The first phase of the project (2019) was aimed at developing a general framework for the organization of a NPRI, starting from the organization of a National Network up to planning and execution of Peer Reviews.

The general framework of NPRI has been developed taking into consideration the outcome of a Preliminary Study that analyzed 7 Peer Review methodologies used at International and National Organizations, the results of a survey carried out at IMPEL Members and the outcomes of three Country visits (two in presence, one virtual, in teleconference because of Covid-19 pandemic outbreak).

The deliverable of the Project were the first release of the NPRI Methodology Manual, Reports on Study and Survey, and all the documents used in the Country Visit.

The second phase of the NPRI Project

The Second Phase of the NPRI Project was strongly affected by the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic persistence, that prevented the possibility to travel and to have direct contact with the Management of IMPEL Members interested in the implementation of the NPRI Methodology to set the basis for its deployment in their Nation.

It was decided, by consequence, to carry out the already foreseen Methodology refinement, broadening the area of work to deliver to IMPEL Members more indications on several strategic and technical topics, through a web-based work.

At the beginning of the second phase of the project, on 16 September 2020 was held an Online Seminar aimed at sharing the results of the first phase, at gathering comments and advices on the work done and at a further enlargement of the Project team. The Seminar was attended by 38 Officials representing 16 countries and it hosted also a speech delivered by the DG Environment of the European Commission about the links between NPRI Project and the ECA Initiative.

The topics worked out by specific work groups of the Project team were:

- Guidance on implementation of a NPRI scheme through a National NPRI Network
- Guidance on Request for a National Peer Review (plus Appendix example Portugal)
- Guidance on Terms of Reference (ToR)
- Guidance on designing an assessment framework
- Guidance on writing a NPRI report
- Guidance on Designing an End of Mission Agenda
- Outline NPRI Training

- Guidance on designing an 'End of Mission Agenda'

Each of these topics constitute the argument of new annexes to the NPRI Methodology document, that has been accordingly amended.

To share the results of the second phase of the project, a closing Online Seminar was organized, in which the new results were shown and a debate on NPRI implementation was held.

The initiative was participated by 32 Officials from 14 Countries, and its outcomes represent the basis for the activities that will be carried out in the third phase of the project, aimed mainly at the implementation of NPRI in interested Countries.

Infact, during the second phase of the Project three Countries asked for IMPEL support to implement NPRI, and two Countries, already implementing their own NPRI scheme will improve their Methodologies on the basis of the NPRI Project outcome.

2.   Use of NPRI phase II budget

The budget use was deeply affected by the new, unpredictable outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic on Autumn 2020, that obliged to confirm all the travel restrictions that it was hoped that they would be removed before the end of 2020 and the expenses regarding the development of NPRI in Countries (i.e.: translations) have not been made.

The statement containing the expenses made in comparison with the budget is shown below:

	Approved Budget	Actual expenditure	Unused Budget	Reason for differences
Travels, accomodation, catering	27.400,00 €	0,00 €	27.400,00 €	Travel ban
Translations (VAT included)	10.000,00 €	0,00 €	10.000,00 €	Delay of Countries in implementation of their own NPRI initiative due to Covid-19 pandemic and consequent no need for documents translation
Consultancy (VAT included)	20.000,00 €	18.148,79 €	1.851,21 €	Decision of the Project Team Managers on the reduction of the total value of the assignment
Total	57.400,00 €	18.148,79 €	39.251,21 €	

3.   Background, Governance and Work Methodology

The General Assembly of IMPEL decided in 2018 to conduct the project 'Establishing a National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)' of which the first phase was carried out in 2019 and 2020. Subsequently, the General Assembly approved a proposal and ToR for the 2nd Phase of the NPRI project, to be carried out

from July 2020 till 31 March 2021. The project leaders and project management team that led Phase I also led Phase II of the project.

To guide the project, the project leaders had and have a frequent contact and discussed the progress of the project. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the communication was through email exchange and video conferencing: all the Project meeting and Seminars, that should have been held "in person" have been organized in teleconference.

The results are to be considered fully acceptable, although the lack of direct contacts and of general *face to face* discussions can be considered a reason for the decrease of dialog and

This document presents the results of Phase II of the project. The report refers to various documents with more detailed information of specific phases or activities as carried out within the framework of this NPRI project, carried out from July 2020 till 31 March 2021.

4.   Project Team

Darko	Blinkow	MKD	
Martine	Blondeel	BE	
Angeliki	Bosdogianni	GR	
Silvia	Brini	IT	
Malgorzata	Budzynska	POL	
Fabio	Carella	IT	*
Dijkens	Chris	NL	
Mihaela Monica	Crisan	RO	
Marc	Du Maine	NL	
Sonia	Eleftheriadou	GR	
Myriam	Fernandez	ES	
Carmen	Herreras	ES	
Thor	Jostein Dahlstrom	NO	
Michal	Kortis	SK	
Juhla	Lathela	FI	
Adele	Lo Monaco	IT	
Paula	Malo	PT	
Mija	Maria	RO	
Raffaella	Marigo	IT	
Raffaella	Melzani	IT	
Alfredo	Pini	IT	
Giulietta	Rak	IT	
Anabela	Rebelo	PT	
Sean	Scott	IE	
Giuseppe	Sgorbati	IT	*
Darja	Stanič Racman	SL	
Thalia	Statha	GR	
Dasa	Sulekova	SK	
Enis	Tela	AL	
Willem Jan	van der Ark	NL	
Ary Bastiaan	van Weerden	NL	
Pieter -Jan	Van Zanten	NL	*

* Project Managers

5.   Governance

A proposal for the NPRI project was included in a ToR and approved by the General Assembly in its meeting in 2018. A project team was set up, led by project leaders from Italy and the Netherlands.

Representatives of Finland, Republic of North Macedonia, Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Albania, Italy and the Netherlands are members of the open NPRI Project Team. The project was supported by a consultant.

The General Assembly approved a proposal and ToR for the 2nd Phase of the NPRI project, to be carried out from July 2020 till 31 March 2021. The project leaders and project management team that led Phase I also led Phase II of the project. Also Phase II of the project was supported by a consultant.

To guide the project, the project leaders had and have a frequent contact and discussed the progress of the project. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the communication was through email exchange and video conferencing.

6. Methodology

6.1 Phase I

For a good understanding of the relationship between both phases of the project, Phase I consisted (in summary) of the following phases:

1	**Discussion document**	A thorough study of literature focused on 'peer review' theory, methodologies and effectiveness resulting in a discussion document containing the 'working principles, scope and focus' of the NPRI concept. An agreed 'discussion document' by the project group will provide guidance to the NPRI project.
2	**Survey and analysis**	A survey based on a questionnaire aiming at mapping the current experience amongst IMPEL members regarding peer reviews in organisations and agencies at all administrative levels.
3	**Preliminary Study**	A preliminary study of Peer Review methodologies as applied by selected organisations
4	**Country visits**	Meetings with authorities the Netherlands and Italy aiming at exchanging experiences regarding Peer Review methodologies as carried out by their organisations, followed by in depth discussions.
5	**National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Scheme, Methodology and Guideline'**	Development of a draft *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Scheme, Methodology and Guideline'*, based on the outcome of the preliminary study, country visits and the outcome of brainstorming sessions.

6.2   Phase II

Phase II of the NPRI project builds on the results of Phase I of the project as carried out in 2019-2020 and focused on:

- Continued development of the 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance';
- Revision of developed material and documentation and including new input;
- The development of 7 Annexes that provide detailed guidance to essential elements of the 'NPRI Methodology and Guidance';
- Integration of the annexes into the 'NPRI Methodology and Guidance' aiming at developing a balanced and complete package;
- Discussing with and encouraging countries and their organisations to implement a NPRI scheme.
- To provide support to countries in preparatory work on the implementation of a NPRI scheme

7.   Annexes that provide guidance on the implementation of the NPRI Methodology and Guidance

7.1   Introduction

The document 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance' describes the design, implementation and execution of an NPRI scheme and reporting of the results. It also describes how a national network can be formed and how support can be offered to virtually all parts of the NPRI process. Various aspects of the NPRI Methodology and Guidance are elaborated in detail in 7 annexes. These annexes aim to provide detailed guidance in the development and implementation of relevant parts of the NPRI Methodology and Guidance. In this chapter, the annexes are briefly described in summary with reference to the full texts that have been integrated in 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance', which is attached as an annex to this report in the subfolder *'Documents NPRI Methodology Phase II'*.

Three small working groups were tasked and involved in brainstorming, discussing and designing annexes.

7.2   Annexes

The following annexes have been developed and/ or revised and completed to support various elements of the 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance':

Annex I: Guidance on implementation of a NPRI scheme through a National NPRI Network

Annex II: Guidance on Request for a National Peer Review (plus Appendix example Portugal)

Annex III: Guidance on Terms of Reference (ToR)

Annex IV: Guidance on designing an assessment framework

Annex V: Guidance on writing a NPRI report

Annex VI: Guidance on Designing an End of Mission Agenda

Annex VI: Outline NPRI Training

Annex VII: Guidance on designing an 'End of Mission Agenda'

7.3   Annexes in summary

7.3.1   Annex I: 'Guidance on implementation of a NPRI scheme through a National NPRI'

This annex is written to give direction to the implementation of a NPRI scheme in countries. Within that context, attention is given to the fact that governance and coordination structures are set up differently in each country. As a consequence, working methods differ per country and there are differences in cooperation between stakeholders. This means that initiatives to implement NPRI must take this into account and that a flexible approach is very important. The guidance explains what an NPRI scheme entails and what is meant by a 'National Network' in the context of an NPRI. The annex then explains which roles can be assigned to a National Network, which steps can be taken to implement a NPRI scheme and which parties and persons can play a role in this. The role of a National NPRI Coordinator is further highlighted as a 'linking pin' in the implementation process. All possible steps of the process are described in the guidance, starting from carrying out a stakeholder analysis to forming the NPRI network and the relevant steps in between. Furthermore, the annex describes in detail how IMPEL can provide support to the various steps of the process. Finally, the activities of the NPRI Network are detailed in the annex and distinguished at:

- Coordination level by a National team of representatives of networks and or governmental organisations and agencies;
- Execution and operational level by a core group of experts on the matter.

The guidance is integrated as Annex I in the document *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'.*

7.3.2   Annex II: 'Guidance on drafting a Request for a National Peer Review'

This annex presents guidance on drawing up a 'Request for a National Peer Review'. This guidance suggests building blocks and options for the content of a letter (Request for Peer Review) to be used in initiating a Peer Review, to provide information and to raise interest in starting and joining a National Peer Review. It is emphasized that this guidance is intended as a short list of subjects, options and suggestions for drawing up a 'Request for a Peer Review' and has the character of a 'checklist'.

A 'Request for a National Peer Review' is basically a short letter that can be sent to organisations by an initiator or initiative group to share concerns about an identified challenge or problem and to invite them to initiate or participate in a (National) Peer Review, in order to gain insights and find ways to achieve improvements. The addressed organisations are asked to take part in the Peer Review. The letter contains as well brief information on next steps in the starting process.

The addressee of a 'Request' depends on the purpose of it. It can be used internally by on organisation to explain the need for a Peer Review to senior management and ask for approval, as well as externally to ask other organisations to join a Peer Review or to ask a (national) coordination body to facilitate in carrying out a Peer Review. The guidance proposes to include in a request information that enables decision-making. The guidance is accompanied by an appendix that contains an example of a *'Letter of Expression of Interest'.*

The guidance is integrated as Annex II in the document 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'.

7.3.3   Annex III: 'Guidance on drafting a Terms of Reference (ToR)'

Annex III presents guidance on drawing up a Terms of Reference (ToR) in which agreements are laid down between organisations with regard to performing a peer review within the framework of the NPRI. The guidance must be understood as a flexible list of subjects, options and suggestions for drawing up and compiling a ToR. In fact, the document has the character of a 'checklist'.

The topics and its proposed elements as included in the annex are based on a brief research of outlines of ToR's as used by various organisations[1] and experiences from involvement in Peer Reviews where ToR's were the basis for the agreements between the involved organisations.

Terms of Reference (ToR) is actually a governance document that sets out documented working arrangements between organisations on the implementation of a proposed project or activity. It defines and shows the purpose and structures of a project and establishes and determines the relationships between those who agreed to work together to accomplish a shared goal. A ToR also aims to confirm or to develop a common understanding of the scope among the involved stakeholders and specifies vital information about the project, such as its background, goals, scope, activities to be done, and it indicates schedules, logistics, and deliverables. Terms of reference is to be understood as establishing a framework for voluntary cooperation and do <u>not</u> create any legally binding obligations between or among the Partners.

After a project has been identified, discussed, defined and planned, a ToR will be prepared upon mutual agreement by the involved partners in the cooperation.

The guidance is integrated as Annex III in the document 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'.

7.3.4   Annex IV: 'Guidance to design an Assessment Framework'

An assessment framework has an important and central position in a Peer-review. An Assessment Framework should provide answers about what is to be reviewed, brings focus, direction and borders to the process of the Peer Review. Therefore, an assessment framework is an important link between the scope and the instruments of the peer-review methodology. A crucial function of an Assessment Framework is that it enables a common language to the participants of the peer-review.

Annex IV outlines in detail guidance and steps of a process that can be considered in designing an assessment framework. In addition, in this annex two examples of an assessment framework are described as used by international organisations.

An assessment framework functions as a consistent reference system against which to evaluate whether (individual) tasks meet set standards and /or requirements, as well as it provides a structured conceptual map of what is to be assessed and measured. Furthermore, it gives insight in the links between 'what is to be assessed' and the design and content of the instrument(s), such as a questionnaire, a review framework, a SWOT-analysis etc. Furthermore, an assessment framework details how an assessment is to be operationalized. It explains both, the 'what' and the 'how'.

Annex IV as guidance on designing an Assessment Framework contains the following elements:

- What is an Assessment Framework?
- Aspects of flexibility, principles and choices that can be made;
- The importance of involvement of senior management;

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[1] Organisations as IMPEL, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the International Atomic and Energy Agency (IAEA), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

- Character of the Peer Review: is it a benchmark, dialogue or a mix of both;
- The aggregation level of an Assessment Framework;
- The use of standards and performance indicators as well as their basis;
- What steps can be taken in developing an assessment framework;
- Measurability of the Assessment Framework and findings;
- Validation of findings.

Finally, the annex provides guidance on how to develop an Assessment Framework and the steps that can be taken, as well as who are or should be involved in this process.

The guidance is integrated as Annex IV in the document *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'*.

7.3.5   Annex V: 'Guidance for experts/reviewers in writing reports of a Peer Review'

In the pursuit of uniformity, a guidance as detailed in Annex V aims to assist in writing a report in a timely manner and being consistent with the overall purpose of the NPRI programme and provides guidance for reporting. A report of the (immediate) output of the Peer Review mission to the reviewed organisation is a key deliverable in the execution of a Peer Review. The (assessment) report includes a presentation of findings and observations in terms of 'Opportunities for Development (OfD)', elaboration on 'Good Practices' and a discussion if and how support can be provided on the implementation.

For the report and its content to be effective, it is important to prepare the report in a way that the correct target group is reached with the relevant and important information. The content of the report should be concise, to the point and with the right 'style and tone', as well as paying attention to the style, format and length of the report.

The guidance also aims to support uniformity within the NPRI scheme. Taking into account the flexible character of a NPRI scheme, drawing up reports can be adjusted to the target group and objectives pursued by the peer review. In case a peer review is implemented within a network with comparable organisations, the reports should aim at uniformity which enables benchmarking.

Furthermore, Annex V provides guidance on responsibilities of the team and its members on writing. This can be a dedicated rapporteur, or if decided responsibilities can be divided over the experts on the matter as team members. The guidance contains suggestions as well on the lay-out of the report and the 'do's and don'ts' in writing a report.

The guidance is integrated as Annex V in the document *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'*.

7.3.6   Annex VI: 'Guidance on designing an End of Mission Agenda'

Experiences with Peer Reviews show that often only part of the results of the review are successfully implemented. This is unfortunate! Lack of effective involvement of key stakeholders, even when it concerns internal stakeholders of the reviewed organisation and the network to which the organisation belongs. This includes, for example: senior management, support departments, network coordinators, etc. In this way, many important findings and recommendations are not used. However, if used, the results of Peer can actually contribute to significant improvements in various areas.

All this underlines the importance of anticipating possible outcomes of the review when designing a Peer Review. This anticipation must then not only relate to the 'internal' and organisation-oriented topics, but also to topics and stakeholders outside the organisation or network. Therefore, proper management of a so called 'End of Mission Agenda' and its elements cannot be overemphasized. This is critical to the overall success of Peer Reviews.

Annex VI provides guidance on designing and management of an 'End of Mission Agenda', as to become a structural and continuous part of the NPRI process. The guidance highlights the importance of paying early attention to the process of designing a Peer Review, the incentive effect it can have on the host organisation, the involvement of senior management, and a balanced attention to all relevant topics. These include the interests of stakeholders the organisation works with or depends.

The Annex provides suggestions for the use of tools on the analysis of an organisations' network and its (internal and external) stakeholders. By using a so called 'influence-interest-matrix', four categories of stakeholders can be identified and their relevance for the organisation in terms of 'power and influence' they potentially have on implementing 'OfD's can be estimated. The outcome of the analysis forms the basis of a strategy that can be used by a successful, efficient and effective implementation of the findings. This is not only the case for a single organisation only but applies also to networks.

The guidance is integrated as Annex VI in the document *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'*

7.3.7 Annex VII: 'Outline NPRI Training'

It is important that members of a review team are optimally prepared, and that every team member has the same understanding of what is expected and what needs to be done to make a Peer Review successful. Therefore, members of a review team need to have expertise to conduct a peer review efficiently and effectively in such a way that its results contribute to the realisation of the goals as set for the review. In addition to the necessary expertise of the subject of the review, it is important to have a (theoretical) basis containing the principles and process of a (NPRI) peer review, background to it, techniques to be applied, the reporting of the results and the provision of support in follow up activities.

Hence, within the framework of the NPRI approach it is advised that a basic training is developed and followed by each team member to ensure that everyone has the same basic knowledge on Peer Reviews and in particular the NPRI. Such a training is also important to safeguard consistency in the approach not only for the mission to be carried out, but also for future missions in the context of the NPRI scheme. Trainings with focus on Peer Reviews are currently not available within IMPEL. Annex VII provides suggestions on basic requirements of a review team and its members which form the basis for a 'Peer Review Training Curriculum' composed of the following 9 sections of a training (to be developed):

1.	Understanding Peer Review and NPRI	6.	Writing the report
2.	Qualifications and expectations of the review team and its members	7.	Presentation of the outcomes
3.	NPRI Process	8.	Implementations of findings and (optionally) support
4.	Gathering information	9.	Examination
5.	Facts and findings		

The 'Outline NPRI Training' details each of these sections into concrete elements of a training curriculum.

The Annex also proposes to adjust the training to the target audiences (trainers, team members and host organisation). Therefore, the following type of trainings could be considered:

- Classroom training
- Online webinar training

- Fully homebased training

In addition to the training as proposed and described, it has to be noted that 'training on the job' is essential for the experts that participate in the 'core group of experts'. The composition of a review team should balance the experienced members and a member who is in the learning phase.

IMPEL is advised as the responsible organisation to develop and administer the training, as well as being responsible for maintenance and keeping the tool up to date.

The outline on training is integrated as Annex VII in the document *'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)Methodology and Guidance'.*

8. Events and deliverables

In this section, events of the NPRI Project Management Team meetings are briefly explained and two online seminars are described. In particular, the online seminar that took place on March 30, 2021 is highlighted more in detail. Subsequently, the testing of the NPRI Method that is envisaged in phase III of the NPRI project is briefly described.

Finally, the deliverables that have been developed and produced in Phase II (time period February 2021 – March 2021) are listed.

8.1 Meetings and conference calls:

During the implementation of phase II of the NPRI project, various consultations took place with and between the NPRI project leaders with the aim of discussing progress, adjusting the project where necessary and organizing meetings of the NPRI Project Team. In the period from February to March 2021, there was regular bilateral contact between the project leaders and the consultant to discuss progress and to discuss the draft documents produced.

8.1.1 Online Project Team Meetings

During this period, two online meetings (10 and 24 February) of the Project Team were held and reported on. On February 10, a brainstorm was held about the outline of 7 annexes to be developed. In particular the subjects 'training, Request for Peer Review and End of Mission Agenda' were discussed. On February 24, first draft documents were presented and discussed, and further direction was given to the development of the annexes and their integration into the main document containing the NPRI methodology and guidance. Both online meetings were attended by approximately 15 people. From both meetings were minutes prepared.

On March 16, at the end of the work carried out by the workgroups tasked to develop the seven annexes, a Project Team meeting was held, to present the produced material to each other to provide reflections and to discuss which adjustments were still needed to complete the annexes.

8.1.2 Online seminars

Two online seminars were organized in the second Phase of the project.

The first one was held on September 2020, and it represented at the same time the presentation of the results achieved in the first phase of the NPRI project and the kick-off of its second phase.

The invitation for the Seminar was widely distributed in IMPEL, being the topic of NPRI and of the seminar largely transversal. The seminar was attended by 38 people, representing 16 countries.

Also Officers of the DG ENV of the EU Commission took part to the event. They delivered an introductory speech and presentation in which they highlighted the importance and relevance of the project, particularly in connection with the implementation of the actions of the Action Plan of the Environmental Compliance Assurance (ECA) initiative.

The second seminar was held on March 30, 2021. Its purpose was to present to the IMPEL community the NPRI Method and Guidance, including the detailed annexes, and to encourage countries and organizations to test and implement an NPRI scheme. The online seminar was partaken by 32 participants, representing 14 countries. During this seminar, all the work developed in the second phase of the NPRI project was presented. This concerns a presentation of the revised and completed National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance and the separate 7 Annexes that separately provide guidance on the implementation of substantive aspects of the method.

During the seminar also a presentation was given on the NPRI project in relation to the Environmental Compliance Assurance (ECA) initiative of the European Commission and in particular in the context of the second ECA work program 2020-2021. An analysis was presented which elements of the work programme can be supported by the NPRI scheme.

In addition, a short presentation was given with a brief preview to the third phase of the project, which will mainly focus on testing the method in countries that volunteer to do so.

Portugal volunteers for testing and is preparing a NPRI peer review on the 'water resources permitting process of the National Water Authority' and shared their experiences with the participants to the online seminar through a presentation. They explained their reason for starting a NPRI, the challenges they meet and ways how to overcome them, as well as a provisionally roadmap for implementing the scheme. In their presentation Portuguese colleagues also discussed the topic of 'support by IMPEL'.

The participants to the seminar then were invited to join and actively contribute to an interactive discussion and to share their reflections on the material as presented. Inspired by the presentation given by Portugal, the participants were also invited to discuss the following questions which were central in the discussion:

- What can I do as a country to organise a NPRI?
- What kind of obstacles or challenges do you encounter in organising a Peer Review?
- What kind of help you may need or expect in preparing a Peer Review and how can we help you?

8.2   Testing of the NPRI Guidance and Methodology

Now that the NPRI Methodology and Guidance and the associated 7 annexes have been developed, it is important to test the NPRI scheme and the guidance as produced in practice. Talks are underway with a number of countries to investigate the possibility of testing. For example, there are contacts with Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Finland and Romania to see if testing is possible. Portugal has now indicated that it will carry out a test and is already making preparations for this. It is also discussed with the countries which support from the NPRI Project Team is desired and can be offered.

From April 1, the focus of the third phase of the project will be on further developing contacts with countries to encourage testing of an NPRI scheme.

8.3   Deliverables Phase II NPRI Project

A large number of documents were produced in phase II of the NPRI project. On the one hand, it concerns documents from phase I of the project that have been significantly modified and revised after

additional study of methodologies and after brainstorming with experts. On the other hand, it concerns the development of 7 annexes that contain detailed guidance of important parts of the NPRI method as described in section 5 of this report. During this process various discussion notes were drafted that facilitated the discussions by the project team.

The following documents represent the deliverables in Phase II:

- **National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance (version 15 May 2021) and Annexes:**
- **Annex I:** **Guidance on implementation of a NPRI scheme through a National NPRI Network**
- **Annex II:** **Guidance on Request for a National Peer Review (plus Appendix example Portugal)**
- **Annex III: Guidance on Terms of Reference (ToR)**
- **Annex IV: Guidance on designing an assessment framework**
- **Annex V:** **Guidance on writing a NPRI report**
- **Annex VI: Guidance on Designing an End of Mission Agenda**
- **Annex VI: Outline NPRI Training**
- **Annex VII: Guidance on designing an 'End of Mission Agenda**
  These documents can be downloaded here:
  Link to NPRI Methodology and Guidance + Annexes

- **Presentations prepared in the framework of the Online meeting of the NPRI Project Team on March 16 2021**
  These documents ca be downloaded here:
  NPRI Online Project Team meeting presentations 16 March 2021

- **Presentations prepared in the framework of the Online Seminar on 16 September 2020:**
  These documents ca be downloaded here:
  NPRI Online Seminar 16 September 2020

- **Presentations prepared in the framework of the Online Seminar on 30 March 2021:**
  These documents ca be downloaded here:
  NPRI Online Seminar 20 March 2021

9. Evaluation

Although Phase II of the project had a late start due to various reasons, it was possible, with joint efforts, to produce the required project results and deliverables before the deadline of 31 March 2021. The Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the course of the project. It was desired to have in person meetings to discuss the project face-to-face as well as to discuss with countries about their availability for testing the NPRI scheme, however due to the pandemic and travel restrictions it was only possible to discuss and engage with countries and organizations through online facilities.

However, it also should be underlined that, despite barriers due to the Covid-19 situation, the second phase of the NPRI project was successful in terms of keeping up to the deadline, the level of involvement of project partners and the number and quality of events and deliverables.

10. To conclude

From 1 February 2021 till 31 March 2021 Phase II of the project *'Establishing a National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI)'* was carried out. Phase II of the project is built on work carried out in Phase I of the project and in particular on the preliminary study of Peer Review Methodologies, the outcome of an internal IMPEL survey and a first version of a draft 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance and accompanying documents.

Also, the outcomes of meetings of the Project Management Team and two online seminars, held on 16 and 30 March, contributed to the work as carried out in Phase II of the project. The outcomes of the seminars undoubtedly added value to all material that has been developed.

Phase II resulted in a consolidated report containing a 'National Peer Review Initiative (NPRI) Methodology and Guidance and 7 detailed Annexes which individually provide guidance to the implementation of the NPRI scheme.

It can be concluded that the current material as developed provides a solid foundation for Phase III of the project, where the focus will be on testing the methodology in countries that volunteer for this. A Terms of Reference on Phase III is drafted and presented to IMPEL's General Assembly and was approved.