

ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

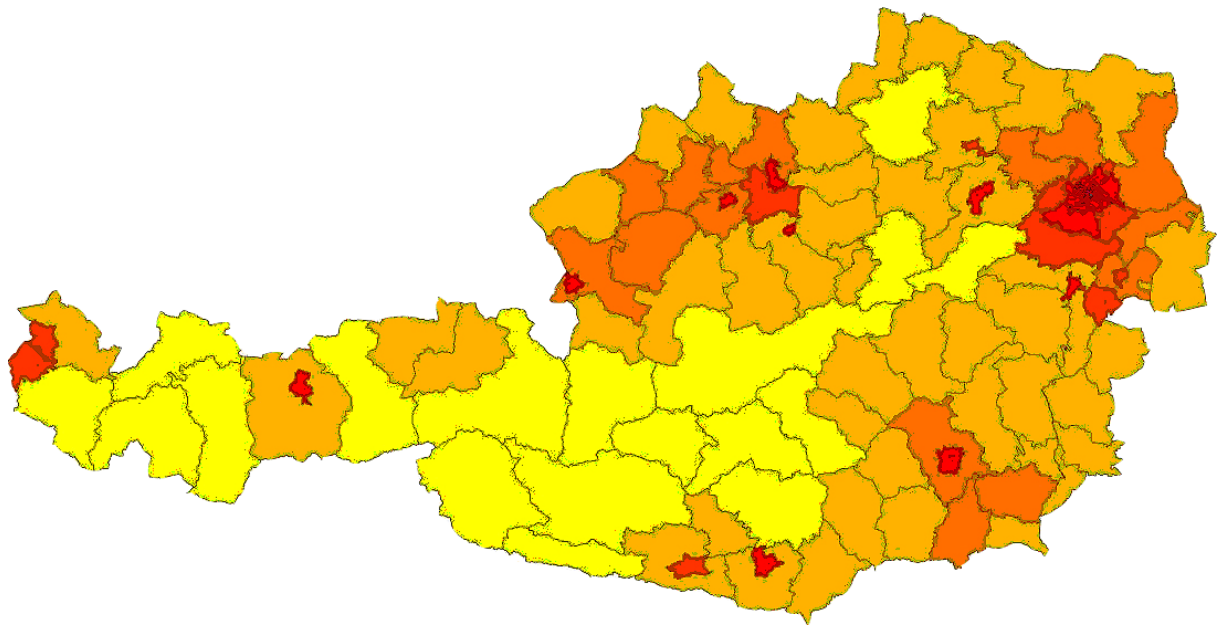
STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (SEA)

OF THE

NATIONAL STRATEGIC REFERENCE

FRAMEWORK FOR AUSTRIA

(STRAT.AT) 2007-2013



Executive Summary

Editors:

Franz Pretenthaler, Nadja Vettters (InTeReg)

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The proposals for the new structural funds regulations for the period 2007-2013 presented by the European Commission in July 2004 envision encouraging a more strategic approach to programming. In this regard two new elements – the “Community Strategic Guidelines” adopted by the Council as well as the national strategic reference document – will constitute the framework for the operational programmes prepared by the Member States.

The national strategic reference framework for Austria – “Strategic Plan Austria (strat.at) 2007-2013”, which was prepared by the ÖROK – constitutes the national framework for the national operational programmes aiming at the objectives “Regional competitiveness and employment” of the new programming period 2007-2013 and – depending on the future status of Land Burgenland – also for the “Convergence” objective. Furthermore strat.at builds an interface to priority 3 (Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification) of the Community strategic guidelines for Rural Development (programming period 2007–2013) and refers to the “European territorial cooperation” objective. According to the nature of a strategy, strat.at lays down possible strategic focal points regarding content and location, building a frame for the operational programmes 2007-2013.

Closely linked to the process of preparing the national framework document strat.at, a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) was undertaken according to the “Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment” of 27 June 2001 (SEA-Directive), the results of which are presented in an environmental report.

Aim of the strategic environmental assessment and the preparation of the environmental report was to fulfil all the requirements determined by Article 5 of the SEA-Directive, particularly to collect, summarise and provide all the necessary information requested by annex I of the Directive, to carry out the required analysis to assess the likely effects on the environment as well as to propose and present measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and offset adverse effects on the environment.

With a view to promoting sustainable development the aim is to provide a high level of protection of the environment in general. Additionally it is ensured that the national framework document strat.at, insofar as its implementation is likely to cause significantly adverse effects on the environment, is continually checked for these effects and that during the process of its preparation suggestions for improvements in this regard are resp. were made.

Chapter 1 of the environmental report describes content, main objectives as well as environmental objectives of strat.at, focussing on the environmental protection objectives contained in legal and strategic political documents currently effective in Austria (conventions, laws, directives, (political) resolutions), which are relevant to the plan. Because a large number of single objectives are closely related to the different strategic fields, which are assessed according to their effects on the achievement of the selected environmental protection objectives (chapter 3), this assessment constitutes a significant contribution to the question of conflicting objectives. Furthermore chapter 1 comprises a table illustrating the selected environmental protection objectives together with the indicators selected for each objective. These indicators do also provide the basis for the description of the current state of the environment in chapter 2, the selected environmental protection objectives build the basis for the assessment of the individual strategic fields in chapter 3.

Building the core of the strategic environmental assessment, chapter 3 contains the assessment of the likely significant effects on the environment on the basis of the plan’s most concrete level – the strategic

fields (on basis of the second draft). On the level of those strategic fields, also alternatives, in most of the cases including measures envisaged to reduce likely adverse effects, are being established and assessed.

One central result of the single assessments which are illustrated in detail is that at the current state of concreteness no significant adverse effects of individual strategic fields on the environment have to be feared. This is also true for the assessment of cumulative effects (on single subjects of protection, across strategic fields). It has to be emphasised again though, that due to the two steps in programming (strat.at on the national level and operational programmes on the level of the Länder) also the SEA is carried out in two steps, which means that the results of the assessment under consideration have to be viewed as preliminary. To make allowance for these circumstances, a "Caveat" was formulated for those fields, for which it can be decided only after more concrete plannings are available at the level of the operational programmes, if significant adverse effects on the environment can be definitely ruled out.

Within priority 1 especially those strategic fields are affected, whose effects on traffic can only be assessed based on a greater level of concreteness, as well as the effects of the development of tourism in rural areas with regard to several subjects of environmental protection. Within priority 2 especially the strategic fields concerned with the development of transport infrastructure and networks, natural resources, energy conservation and eco-investments are affected by such Caveats. The strategic field "infrastructure and network development" does also exhibit negative assessments in some subjects of protection. In order to reduce those effects, offsetting measures were included in the formulation of alternatives. The same is true for other strategic fields exhibiting negative assessments.

Information on the planned measures envisaged concerning monitoring is completing the environmental report.