

Human Impact Assessment

The Ideacard series is published by the Municipal Welfare Strategies group in the Municipality Services division of the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES).

Each Ideacard offers guidance and presents practices that enable professionals in various fields to develop their activities.

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Work in different sectors of local government in Finland involves a great deal of decisions that impact on welfare and health among local residents. When decisions are being prepared, it is important to have information on their impacts.

Human Impact Assessment is a method that enables the welfare and health impacts of various alternative decisions to be pinpointed before decision-making. Assessment helps find the best alternative to achieve desired goals.

From remedial to preventive approaches - future perspectives

Municipalities in Finland are responsible for promoting sustainable development and welfare among local residents. To this end, they need advance information on the welfare and health impacts of decisions.

Human Impact Assessment (HuIA) is a tool for prospective assessment and preventive policies. It helps move the emphasis from remedial to preventive work, offering a comprehensive view of the social and health impacts of decisions.

Other processes of prospective assessment include Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA), both of which form part of Human Impact

Assessment. Other types of prospective assessment include Gender Impact Assessment, Child Impact Assessment, Mental Health Impact Assessment and Health Inequalities Impact Assessment.

A missing link in municipal planning?

Municipalities gather information on past activities and developments. At the same time, future strategies and programmes are underway. The link between the information gathered and strategies easily remains loose.

HuIA is a process that enables a move from the analysis of the present towards strategy-making and the description of future options. This Ideacard describes a model of Rapid Human Impact Assessment.

Decision-making needs to be transparent and systematic. Human Impact Assessment:

- **Helps choose the final decision;**
- **Makes justifications behind decisions more visible;**
- **Draws more attention to welfare and health aspects;**
- **Supports participation and commitment; and**
- **Offers opportunities to discuss values and goals.**

Model of rapid HuIA

Human Impact Assessment generally has the following stages:

- Screening & scoping
- Acquiring information
- Describing alternatives
- Identifying impacts
- Appraising alternatives
- Reporting
- Monitoring

In Finland, prospective assessment is a statutory process in urban planning (Land Use and Building Act), in drafting certain plans and programmes (Act on the Assessment of the Impacts of the Authorities' Plans, Programmes and Policies on the Environment) and in planning certain projects (Act on Environmental Impact Assessment Procedure).

In addition, prospective assessment is used in other planning and decision-making contexts in municipalities. Examples of prospective assessment with regard to various decisions, programmes and committee proposals can be found on the STAKES website at: <http://info.stakes.fi/iva/EN/index.htm>

HuIA can be accelerated, if necessary. Rapid HuIA has three stages only:

- 1) Describing alternatives
- 2) Identifying impacts
- 3) Appraising alternatives

Rapid HuIA can be implemented during one business meeting, for instance. It can be carried out by a single official responsible for preparing a decision, alone (after consulting others) or together with an expert or a working group. The official has the responsibility for the HuIA methodology while the expert is expected to identify impacts. A summary table or an assessment form, for instance, is helpful in reporting on HuIA.

1) Describing alternatives

Alternatives help define desired outcomes. They can be seen to represent the viewpoints and demands of certain groups. This also enables discussion on any conflicts involved in decision-making.

One way to create alternatives is to suggest possible scenarios that describe the future. Scenarios help see how one's own work and the issue to be decided on relate to the future. Alternatives are described so as to ensure that the contents of the operational models are understandable to all. This enables discussion on the pros and cons of different alternatives.

2) Identifying impacts

Impact identification implies discussions on what opportunities and threats are involved in each alternative or how different alternatives affect:

- Different population groups and health inequalities between them (children, gender aspects, staff etc.);
- Determinants of Welfare and health (such as housing, mobility or living environments); or
- Coal attainment

Impacts can be identified through discussions in working groups, expert consultation and feedback from people. Checklists, customer questionnaires and employee/ researcher interviews, for instance, can be made use of in the identification.

A summary table as an assessment tool

Example: alternative interventions on a school network and their impacts.

	Alternative A Current school network	Alternative B Certain large schools will be closed down	Alternative C Small schools will be joined
Costs per pupil	EUR 5700	EUR 5540	EUR 5280
Absences	38 hours	45 hours	64 hours
Impacts for village	a growing sense of security and community	a declining sense of security and community	no changes in the sense of security, a declining sense of community

3) Appraising alternatives

The impacts of different alternatives are described and compared.

The alternatives are appraised so as to decide how each alternative allows the desired goals to be attained or which alternative would produce the best overall effects.

The assessment documents record different stakeholders' views of goal attainment, impacts and the distribution of impacts across those affected. It is also important to consider how any negative impacts could be alleviated and positive impacts strengthened.

A summary table as an assessment tool

A summary table is useful in appraising alternatives and reporting assessment results. Impact assessments are recorded at intersections between impacts and alternatives.

The intention is not to add together impacts by scoring them or converting them into money but to describe them in the most appropriate way.

The above table describes alternative interventions on a school network and their impacts. One dimension of impacts consists of the costs or savings incurred by each alternative. In our example, this dimension is represented by costs per pupil at a given time. Some other impacts can be measured, such as noise, violence against

children or the number of lone elderly. Our example uses the estimated level of absences as a measurable impact.

The rest of the impacts are qualitative. They cannot be measured in money or given in figures but may well be described in words. The example shows the monetary, measurable and qualitative impacts of each alternative.

The summary table provides a concise presentation of the impacts to facilitate decision-making. In the background material the impacts can be described in more detail and justifications can be offered. Decision-makers will then consider the values associated with the impacts and compare the pros and cons of the alternatives.

A form for rapid HuIA

More information

<http://info.stakes.fi/iva/EN/index.htm>

Example: an assessment form for committee decision-making

The form illustrates one possibility of using HuIA in the preparatory work for a proposal to be considered by a municipal committee or the municipal council.

The official responsible for the preparatory work describes on the form what the impacts of the draft proposal will be and also what is likely to happen if the decision is not made. If other solutions have been brought up in discussions, their impacts should also be recorded. HuIA can form part of the draft proposal or be attached to it in the form of a table or a written presentation.

A municipality is an entity - its different sectors influencing each other

The goals and solutions of different administrative sectors in municipalities are interdependent. For instance, it is not possible for the social and health sector or elderly care to succeed in their goals without support from other sectors.

Decision-making in other administrative sectors have direct or indirect effects on the need for services in the social and health sector, as well as on the welfare and health of the population. Similarly, the effects of decision-making in the social and health sector are felt in other sectors as well.

1. Impacts if the activities continue unchanged

2. Impacts of the draft proposal

3. Impacts of alternative solutions

The table below illustrates how elderly care, traffic facilities and housing services are implemented in two future-oriented models and what the consequences of each model are for the municipality. The two models call for different kinds of arrangements in transport services and housing services for older people.

If the emphasis in elderly care is to be on home-based services, the Services on Wheels model should also be applied in urban and traffic planning and housing services.

Contact us

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Example: Alternatives for an old age strategy in the municipality of Askola

	Services on Wheels model	Clients on the Move model
Elderly care	home-based services	clients are brought to facilities
Traffic planning	connections within villages important	connections to centres important
Housing and renovation	it is worthwhile to renovate accommodation	care facilities and sheltered housing important
Urban planning	villages included in planning	construction projects mostly in centres