Assessment and management of environmental noise

2000/0194(COD) - 30/03/2017 - Follow-up document

The Commission presented a report on the implementation of the environmental noise Directive in accordance with Directive 2002/49/EC.

This second implementation report reviews the situation since the publication of the first report in 2011, and also represents the action plan following the evaluation of the Directive, which took place in 2016 under the Commission's Regulatory Fitness and Performance (REFIT) programme.

The evaluation and implementation assessment of the Directive have demonstrated several areas where activities are needed to reduce noise impacting citizens' health in the Union, to better achieve the objectives of the Directive and thereby moving closer to WHO recommended values.

The delay in the implementation of the Directive: this is mainly due to the **lack of priority** given to the issue at the national/local level when deciding on the allocation of limited human and financial resources.

With regard to the preparation of action plans, delays are a repercussion of delays in **noise mapping** and are also related to the short timeframe between the deadline for the preparation of noise maps and action plans (twelve months). More than 20% of the required noise maps, and around 50% of the action plans for the current five-year reporting cycle, have not yet been reported.

An important implementation challenge was the **broadened scope of the Directive** and the considerably increased number of entities for which noise maps and action plans had to be produced (e.g. the number of agglomerations covered increased from 176 to 467).

In order to enable Member States to **fill implementation gaps**, the Commission will adopt **targeted implementing measures** and provide Member States with **scientifically sound guidance**, in particular with regard to the assessment of harmful effects with the help of dose effect relationships.

The Commission invited Member States to reconsider their implementation arrangements, including the **designation of quiet areas**. While many Member States have made progress in developing definitions of quiet areas (in agglomerations and open country) and in defining selection criteria to designate them, **only 13 Member States** have to date designated any quiet areas.

Database: the report stressed the importance of collecting harmonised data on EU level is important to provide a high-quality evidence base for the further development of EU noise-at-source legislation. With the improved implementation of the Directive, resulting in a **complete database on noise exposure in the Union**, it will be possible to better inform policy options for noise reduction measures in the area of transport. The Commission is committed to make full use of this in the future when deciding about revising the legal instruments.

Scope: the Commission considered that some clarifications could be made to certain definitions and that the Directive could be updated taking into account recent regulatory developments at EU level since the Directive was adopted. New scientific evidence suggests that **harmful health effects can occur at lower levels** than those so far addressed by the Directive. The Commission will therefore engage in a dialogue with stakeholders to assess how these issues can best be addressed without unnecessarily reducing the flexibility of Member States to define their own levels of ambition or choice of approaches.

Exposure to excessive noise levels: while competence in this area lies with the Member States, the Commission will stimulate and encourage activities to mitigate excessive noise in urban areas, for example by facilitating the exchange of good practices, as well as supporting research and innovation in this field.

High initial cost of measures and long periods to recover the financial investment: the Commission considered that measures to address the noise problem directly are highly efficient when comparing their costs to the societal benefit. Therefore, it encouraged Member States to implement noise mitigation measures as part of their action plans by also **attracting private investment**.

Opportunities for co-financing: the Commission suggested that Member States may use **targeted EU co-financing** from, for example, the Cohesion Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the implementation of noise-mitigating measures where they are part of a process to improve the urban environment or to develop low-noise transport systems.

Lastly, the Commission encouraged Member States to **raise the awareness of citizens and local and regional authorities** to the long-term health implications of exposure to excessive noise levels from transport so that measures to reduce noise be considered as priorities.