

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

Recast

2022/0347(COD) - 24/04/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 381 votes to 225, with 17 abstentions, a legislative resolution on the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (recast).

The European Parliament's position adopted at first reading under the ordinary legislative procedure amends the proposal as follows:

Objectives

The directive lays down provisions on air quality with the aim of achieving a '**zero pollution**' objective, so that air quality within the Union is progressively improved to levels that are no longer considered harmful to human health, natural ecosystems and biodiversity, thus contributing to an environment free of toxic substances by 2050.

The new rules set stricter 2030 limits and target values, compared to current rules, for several pollutants including particulate matter (PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀), NO₂ (nitrogen dioxide) and SO₂ (sulphur dioxide), benzene, carbon monoxide, arsenic, cadmium, lead, nickel and benzo(a)pyrene.

By 31 December 2030 and every 5 years thereafter, and more often if substantial new scientific findings, such as revised WHO Air Quality Guidelines, point to the need for it, the Commission should **review the scientific evidence** related to air pollutants and their effects on human health and the environment relevant to achieving the objectives set out in the Directive.

Establishment of zones and average exposure territorial units

Member States should establish zones and average exposure territorial units throughout their territory, including, where appropriate for the purposes of air quality assessment and management, at the level of agglomerations. Air quality assessment and air quality management should be carried out in all zones and average exposure territorial units.

Postponement of attainment deadline and exemption from the obligation to apply certain limit values

Where, in a given zone, conformity with the limit values for particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), nitrogen dioxide, benzene or benzo(a)pyrene cannot be achieved by the deadline of 2030, Member States may postpone that deadline for that particular zone by a period justified by an air quality roadmap and provided that the certain conditions are met:

(a) **up to 1 January 2040**, if justified by site-specific dispersion characteristics, orographic boundary conditions, adverse climatic conditions, transboundary contributions, or where the necessary reductions can only be achieved by replacing a considerable fraction of the existing domestic heating systems that are the source of pollution causing exceedances; or

(b) **up to 1 January 2035**, if justified by projections that demonstrate that even taking into account the expected impact of effective air pollution measures identified in the air quality roadmap, the limit values cannot be attained by the attainment deadline.

Air quality plans and roadmaps

Where, in given zones, the levels of pollutants in ambient air exceed any limit value or target value laid down in Annex I, Member States should establish air quality plans for those zones that set out appropriate measures to achieve the limit value or target value concerned and to keep the exceedance period as short as possible, and in any case **no longer than 4 years** from the end of the calendar year in which the first exceedance was recorded.

In addition to air quality plans, required for those EU countries exceeding limits, all member states will have to **create air quality roadmaps by 31 December 2028** that set out short- and long-term measures to comply with the new 2030 limit values.

Where an air quality plan or air quality roadmap is not established, Member States should provide to the public and the Commission a detailed justification as to why there is no significant potential to reduce the exceedance resulting in a decision not to establish an air quality plan or air quality roadmap.

Member States should encourage the active involvement of all interested parties in the preparation, implementation and update of air quality plans and air quality roadmaps.

Public information

Member States should:

- make available through a public source, in an easily understandable manner, an **air quality index** covering hourly updates on at least sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) and ozone, provided that there is an obligation to monitor those pollutants pursuant to this Directive. Insofar as possible, the air quality index should be **comparable** across all Member States and follow WHO recommendations;
- make publicly available information on **symptoms associated with air pollution peaks** and on air pollution exposure reduction and protection behaviours, and should encourage its display to the public in locations frequented by sensitive population and vulnerable groups, such as healthcare facilities.

Access to justice

It is intended that concerned citizens and environmental NGOs should have access to justice to challenge the implementation of this directive in the Member States, and that citizens should be entitled to compensation where their health has been damaged as a result of breaches of the new national rules.