

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe.

Recast

2022/0347(COD) - 20/11/2024 - Final act

PURPOSE: to set out air quality provisions with the aim to achieve a zero-pollution objective, so that air quality within the Union is progressively improved to levels no longer considered harmful to human health, natural ecosystems or biodiversity, contributing to a toxic-free environment at the latest by 2050.

LEGISLATIVE ACT: Directive (EU) 2024/2881 of the European Parliament and of the Council on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (recast).

CONTENT: the directive lays down **enhanced EU air quality standards for 2030** that are closer to the WHO guidelines on air quality. It lays down limit values, target values, average exposure reduction obligations, average exposure concentration objectives, critical levels, alert thresholds, information thresholds and long-term objectives.

Scope

The revised directive covers a host of air-polluting substances, including fine particles and particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), benzo(a)pyrene, arsenic, lead and nickel, among others, and establishes specific standards for each one of them. For instance, the annual limit values for the pollutants with the highest documented impact on human health, PM_{2.5} and NO₂, would be reduced from 25 µg/m³ to 10 µg/m³ and from 40 µg/m³ to 20 µg/m³ respectively.

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 **will review the scientific evidence** related to air pollutants and their effects on human health and the environment. Based on this review, the Commission will then present **proposals** to revise air quality standards, to include other pollutants and/or to propose further action to be taken at EU level.

Assessment of ambient air quality

The directive provides for a common approach to the assessment of ambient air quality which should be followed by applying **common assessment criteria**. When assessing ambient air quality, account should be taken of the size of populations and ecosystems exposed to air pollution. It is therefore appropriate to classify the territory of each Member State into zones reflecting the population density and average exposure territorial units.

Fixed measurements should be mandatory in zones where assessment thresholds are exceeded.

Pollutants of emerging concern, such as ultrafine particles, black carbon and elemental carbon, as well as ammonia and the oxidative potential of particulate matter, will be measured at **monitoring supersites** at both rural background locations and urban background locations. Detailed measurements of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) should be made in order to understand better the impacts of that pollutant and to develop appropriate policies.

Postponement of attainment deadlines

The provisional agreement provides Member States with the possibility to request, by 31 January 2029 and for specific reasons and under strict conditions, a postponement of the deadline for attaining the air quality limit values:

- **until no later than 1 January 2040** for areas where compliance with the directive by the deadline would prove unachievable due to specific climatic and orographic conditions or where the necessary reductions can only be achieved with significant impact on existing domestic heating systems;
- **until no later than 1 January 2035** (with possibility to extend it by two more years) if projections show that the limit values cannot be achieved by the attainment deadline.

Any extension of the deadline in a given area will have to be accompanied by an air quality roadmap (to be established by 2028) and assessed by the Commission, demonstrating that the exceedance will be as short as possible and that the limit value will be respected at the latest by the end of the postponement period.

Air quality plans and air quality roadmaps

In cases where a limit or target value is exceeded or there is a concrete risk of exceeding the alert or information thresholds for certain pollutants, the directive requires Member States to establish:

- an **air quality roadmap** ahead of the deadline if between 2026 and 2029 the level of pollutants exceeds the limit or target value to be attained by 2030;
- **air quality plans** for areas where the levels of pollutants exceed the limit and target values set out in the directive after the deadline;
- **short-term action plans** setting out emergency measures (e.g. restricting the circulation of vehicles, suspending construction works, etc.) to reduce the immediate risk to human health in areas where the alert thresholds will be exceeded.

Transboundary air pollution

Where transboundary transport of air pollution from one or more Member State contributes significantly to the exceedance of any limit value, ozone target value, average exposure reduction obligation or alert threshold in another Member State, that other Member State will notify the Member States from which the air pollution originated and the Commission thereof. The Member States concerned will cooperate with each other, including by establishing joint teams of experts and with technical support from the Commission, to identify the sources of air pollution, contributions of those sources to exceedances in another Member State and the measures to be taken individually and in coordination with other Member States to address those sources, and draw up coordinated activities, such as the coordination of air quality plans.

Access to justice and right to compensation

The new directive sets out provisions to ensure access to justice for those who have a sufficient interest and want to challenge its implementation, including public health and environmental NGOs. Member States should ensure that citizens are entitled to claim and obtain **compensation** where damage to their health has occurred as a result of an intentional or negligent violation of the national rules transposing certain provisions of the directive.

ENTRY INTO FORCE: 10.12.2024.

TRANSPOSITION: 11.12.2026 at the latest.