

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe. Recast

2022/0347(COD) - 13/09/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, partial vote at 1st reading/single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 363 votes to 226, with 43 abstentions, amendments to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (recast).

The matter was referred back to the committee responsible for inter-institutional negotiations.

Subject matter

This Directive seeks to set out a zero-pollution objective for air quality, so that within the Union air quality is progressively improved to levels no longer considered harmful to human health, natural ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as aligning with the most recent air quality recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO).

This Directive sets:

- intermediate limit values, target values, average exposure reduction obligations, average exposure concentration objectives and critical levels to be met as soon as possible and by the year 2030 at the latest;
- limit values to be met by 2035, which are to be regularly reviewed;
- long-term objectives, information thresholds and alert thresholds as part of air quality standards.

This Directive defines: (i) measures for monitoring ambient air quality long-term trends and impacts of Union and national measures, as well as measures established in cooperation with third countries, on ambient air quality; (ii) measures ensuring that the information on ambient air quality is harmonised across the Union and made available to the public; (iii) measures promoting increased cooperation between Member States, regional and local authorities, within and between Member States, as well as with third countries that have a common border with the Union, in reducing air pollution.

Sampling points

The amended text stressed the need to increase the number of sampling points for air quality. It is stipulated that the location of sampling points should be representative of the exposure of at-risk communities and of the exposure of one or more sensitive population and vulnerable groups.

Monitoring supersites

Each Member State should establish at least one monitoring supersite per 2 million inhabitants (instead of 10 million inhabitants) at an urban background location. Member States that have fewer than 2 million inhabitants should establish at least one monitoring supersite at an urban background location.

In zones where high concentrations of ultrafine particles, black carbon, mercury and ammonia (NH₃) are likely to occur, there should be one sampling point per one million inhabitants (instead of one sampling point per 5 million inhabitants).

Measurements at all monitoring supersites at locations characteristic of urban background pollution and locations characteristic of rural background pollution should include fixed measurements of particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), carbon monoxide (CO), ozone (O₃), black carbon, ammonia (NH₃) and ultrafine particles.

With regard to ambient air quality assessment of pollutants, it is specified that Member States will have to monitor levels of black carbon, ammonia and mercury.

Requirements where levels are below limit values, the target value for ozone and average exposure indicators

Members suggest defining a smaller geographical area for calculating the average exposure indicator (AEI) and the obligation to reduce average exposure. They propose that this calculation be carried out at NUTS 2 level rather than NUTS 1.

Air quality plans and roadmaps

Members propose that, in addition to air quality plans, all Member States should also draw up air quality roadmaps for zones within which concentrations of pollutants in ambient air exceed the relevant air quality limit values set for 2030. The air quality roadmap should set out short- and long-term policies and measures in order to comply with those limit values by 2030 at the latest.

Member States should ensure that before the time period for receiving comments from the public starts, the draft air quality plan or draft air quality roadmap containing the minimum information required is made available to the public on the internet, free of charge and without restricting access to registered users, and, where appropriate, through other non-digital communication channels.

Relevant stakeholders and citizens should be duly informed about the specific sources and air pollutants affecting air quality and the relevant air pollution mitigation measures that exist and are available on the market.

Greater protection for citizens

In order to inform citizens about poor air quality and its effects, competent authorities shall require the permanent display of easily understandable information on symptoms associated with air pollution peaks and on behaviour to reduce exposure to air pollution in the vicinity of communities of sensitive population and vulnerable groups.

Member States should establish an air quality index covering sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) and ozone and make it available in a coherent and easily understandable manner through a public source providing an hourly update, ensuring

that sufficient real-time data is available in all stations.