

**Warsaw**

**12 February 2019**

## Special Report N° 23/2018:

# Air pollution: Our health still insufficiently protected



EUROPEAN  
COURT  
OF AUDITORS



**Why did we do this audit?**



**Audit scope and approach**



**Observations**



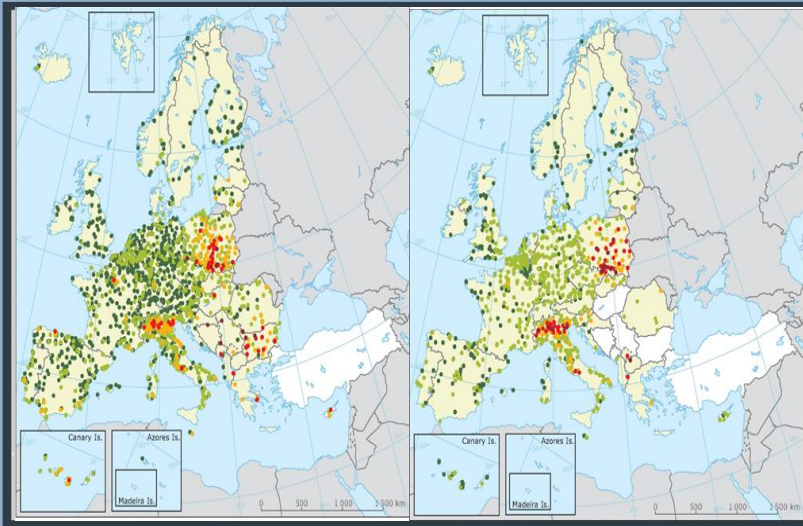
**Recommendations**



# Why did we do this audit?

## Importance of the topic

- Air pollution is a serious health issue in the EU
- Long lasting problems in many EU cities



**400,000**  
people  
die prematurely  
because of  
air pollution  
each year in the EU



The European Commission estimates **the total health related external costs** of air pollution at between **€330** and **€940** billion per year



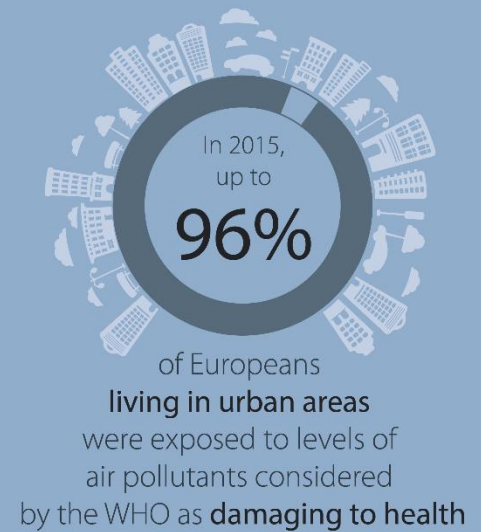
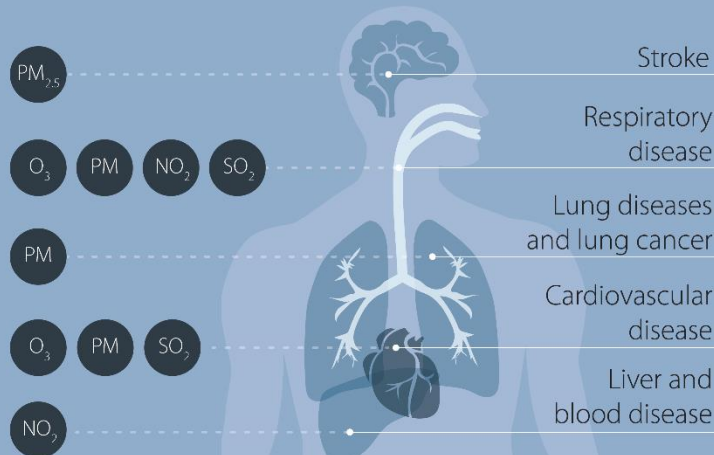
# What did we look at?

## Audit scope

- Health impacts of air pollution
- Measured concentrations (levels and monitoring networks)
- Air Quality Plans and infringement procedures
- Public information



### Effects on human health





# What questions did we ask?

## Audit questions

1. Was the AAQ Directive well **designed** to tackle the health impact of air pollution?
2. Did the Member States effectively **implement** the Directive?
3. Did the Commission **monitor** and enforce implementation of the Directive?
4. Was air quality adequately **supported** by other EU policies and funds?



# What did we find?

## Improvements needed

- The AAQ Directive contains some weak provisions
- Member States often target compliance, not effectiveness
- The Commission faces limitations in its monitoring
- Lengthy Court cases with scarce results
- Inconsistent EU policies and funding
- Growing role of citizen action

# Observations

1

## The AAQ Directive contains some weak provisions

### Weaknesses



- Gaps in **EU standards**
  - no short term for PM2.5, the most harmful pollutant;
  - SO2 six times > the WHO guideline value.
- (+ Traffic and industrial monitoring stations).
- (+ Air Quality Plans).
- Late **data reporting**.

### Strengths



- Useful **common framework** with a sound rationale.
- Concentrations are **slowly decreasing**.
- PM10 (daily) and NO2 standards are **aligned with WHO**.



- **Weak criteria for monitoring stations:**  
MS are free to decide on number and location of traffic and industrial monitoring stations.
- **Air Quality Plans:**
  - **short of targeted measures** and not implemented quickly.
  - **local action is limited** by regional and national competences (e.g. on funding priorities, diesel taxation, parking policies, low emission zones).
  - reluctance on targeting **private transport**
  - AQPs based on (weak) Euro standards.
- **Real-time data** not always accessible to citizens.





#### Strengths



- Stuttgart monitoring network (the best of the 6 visited cities).
- **Good projects:**
  - Boiler replacement schemes (Ostrava and Krakow),
  - Replacement of diesel busses (Sofia and Ostrava).
- Good practices in public information (Brussels, Milan).

### Weaknesses



- **Air Quality Plans:**
  - No obligation for concise, complete and updated AQPs.
  - No obligation for progress reporting.
  - No limit in number of AQPs. All EU national languages used.
- **Difficult to monitor certain provisions**
  - location of more than 2.500 monitoring stations in the EU
  - compliance with short term action plans or public information duties

### Strengths



- AQPs identify **main sources** of local air pollution.
- COM/EEA databases contain very **extensive official data** reported by the Member States.

# Observations

## 4

### Legal proceedings are very lengthy and produced scarce results

#### Weaknesses



- **6 to 8 years** to get non-compliance confirmed
- Lack of clear corrective action to date

#### Strengths



- The Commission has been successful in getting **favourable rulings** from the European Court of Justice

### Weaknesses



- Some EU policies with **elements that are detrimental** to air quality:
  - Climate change (biomass)
  - Transport (diesel)
  - Energy (Ecodesign)
  - Industry (derogations)
  - Agriculture (NH3 emissions)
- Poor targeted **projects** and projects of where air quality impacts are difficult to assess.

### Strengths



- Climate and energy policies can support clean air
- Life Projects (LIFE Clean Air, LIFE Legal Actions)

# Cohesion policy projects visited

Country	Beneficiary	Sector	Description
CZ	Private citizens	Household heating	Regional scheme for the replacement of about 3,500 household boilers.
	Veolia Energy	Heating	3 projects for reduction of NOx, SO2 and PM.
	Arcelor Mittal	Industry	3 projects targeting fugitive emissions, PM and NOx.
	TAMEH	Energy	1 project aimed at reducing the emissions of NOx.
	Public transport company	Transport	Replacement of 105 diesel buses by CNG buses.
PL	EDF	Heating	DeNOxification of coal
	Public transport company	Transport	Integrated public transport (new trams, better infrastructure, comfort and safety)
	Schools	Buildings	New heating system and isolation
	Private citizens	Household heating	Reduction of low stack emissions (boilers replacement)
BG	Public transport company	Transport	Acquisition of 20 new trams and 50 new trolley buses.
	Public transport company	Transport	Acquisition of 128 new busses.
	Sofia metro	Transport	Metro line extensions and acquisition of 10 new subway trains.



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# LIFE projects visited

Country	Coordinating beneficiary	Name	Description
DE	Verkehrsclub Deutschland	LIFE Clean Air	NGO capacity building and networking actions addressing the reduction of the PM and NO2 emissions.
	Deutsche Umwelthilfe	LIFE Legal Actions	Empower NGOs and citizens to take part in air policy and take legal action.
	Deutsche Umwelthilfe	LIFE Clean Heat	Reduction of the amount of PM and soot in heating systems. Project addresses specifically private wood burning.
IT	Emilia-Romagna	LIFE Opera	Development of a methodology and a tool to assess the efficiency of planned measures for tackling air quality.
	Emilia-Romagna	LIFE IPE Prepair	Implementation of actions in the territory of the Po Valley and Slovenia in order to improve air quality and comply with directive 2008/50/EC.
PL	Malopolska	LIFE IPE Malopolska	Full implementation of the Malopolska Air Quality Plan, through the effective use of available EU and national funds.





# What do we recommend?

The Commission should:

- ✓ Act more effectively on the implementation of the AAQ Directive
- ✓ Consider a higher level of ambition of the Directive
- ✓ Aim to align other EU policies with air quality objectives
- ✓ Contribute to improve air quality information to EU citizens





## *Recommendation 1:* **Acting more effectively**

- a) Share best practices on Air Quality Plans (targeted, budgeted and short-term measures).
- b) Shorten the length of the legal proceedings.
- c) Assist MS more affected by transboundary air pollution (effective and coherent measures in AQPs).



## Recommendation 2: Strengthening the AAQ Directive

- a) Reduce gaps with the WHO air quality guidelines (including a short-term standard for PM2.5).
- b) Air Quality Plans: result oriented and implementation reports.
- c) Better criteria for the monitoring stations measuring high concentrations. Commission can require additional monitoring.
- d) Member States should disclose real time data and report earlier to the Commission.



## *Recommendation 3:* **Assessing EU policies and funding**

- a) Assess other EU policies that impact air quality and align objectives
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) Assess the use of EU funding on reducing emissions of the main air pollutants (PM, NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub>)



## *Recommendation 4:* **Improving air quality information to citizens**

- a) Spread information on health impacts and precautionary measures.
- b) Rank zones with best and worse performances.
- c) Create channels for citizens to report on bad practices to the Commission.
- d) Harmonise air quality indexes.



*Further reading soon...*

*The European Court of Auditors contributed to the EUROSAI joint audit on air quality, along with 15 other Supreme Audit Institutions.*

*The final report was published on 30 January 2019.*



**Thank you  
for your attention!**

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