



## Implementation Report

### Second Consultation, on Air Quality Directives

#### Executive summary – key findings

##### Introduction and context

The two EU Ambient Air Quality (AAQ) Directives (2008/50/EC and 2004/107/EC)<sup>1</sup> and the National Emission Ceilings (NEC) Directive (2016/2284/EU)<sup>2</sup> are pillars of the EU's air policy.

The Fitness Check of the AAQ Directives has been published by the European Commission on 28 November 2019. In this regard, the RegHub implementation report is complementary to the European Commission's Fitness Check and provides an early assessment of the implementation of the NEC Directive. From the point of view of local and regional authorities (LRAs), air quality is important both due to its impact on local and regional communities and because of LRAs' potential role in improving the implementation of air quality policies.

The main purpose of the survey was therefore to identify the strengths and weaknesses of this implementation and highlight those fields where improvements are needed.

The CoR will ensure that the results of the survey are taken into account in its future contributions to EU debates on this topic.

The results of the survey will also be useful to support the preparation of the CoR Opinion on "*The Future of EU Clean Air policy in the framework of the zero-pollution ambition*".

The Zero-pollution ambition is a new European Commission proposal within the framework of the European Green Deal. The Communication on the Green Deal<sup>3</sup> proposes a Zero-pollution action plan for water, air and soil (foreseen for 2021) and more specific actions on air quality.

##### Content of the survey

The survey included questions on different topics related to air quality policy, which are useful to assess the implementation of that policy.

One set of questions focused on the AAQ Directives while a second set concentrated on the NEC Directive. Both these types of questions investigated the role of LRAs in the implementation of specific measures mentioned in the Directives. Moreover, they were purposefully searching for possible shortcomings and ideas for improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/quality/existing\\_leg.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/quality/existing_leg.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/reduction/index.htm>

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

Other questions covered other aspects, such as planning (Environment Action Programme<sup>4</sup>), implementation (TAIEX PEER-2-PEER<sup>5</sup>, Environmental Implementation Review<sup>6</sup>, infringements), funding (available funding, incentives) and connections with climate and energy policies. Furthermore, the involvement of LRAs in initiatives and networks at EU level was investigated.

There were few recurring aspects in the answers to the survey questions and open questions tended to generate feedback on a variety of issues, making it difficult to aggregate individual contributions made by the hubs into an overall conclusion. Those individual contributions are set out in the full implementation report. Nevertheless, the following paragraphs are an attempt to draw some general conclusions.

### **Local and regional focus on heterogeneous policy areas**

The hubs represent LRAs with different characteristics, from all over the European Union. Naturally, their views on specific topics differ according to the reality they experience 'on the ground'. This is confirmed by the heterogeneity of the replies, particularly to the open questions. This might indicate that for LRAs, air quality policy needs to be linked with multiple policies, as part of a cross-sector approach, fostering more comprehensive policy integration.

### **Multi-level governance and need for cooperation**

Answers related to horizontal issues, such as execution and governance aspects, were equally heterogeneous. LRAs have significant responsibilities and fulfil particular functions connected to air policy. In general, multiple answers, in particular to the open questions, tend to point towards the importance of cooperation both horizontally with other LRAs and vertically in the framework of multi-level governance.

### **Diversity of LRA involvement in the implementation**

The involvement of LRAs in the field of air policy is very important. Member States rely on LRAs for some tasks: LRAs usually have responsibilities for air quality assessment and most of them have contributed to, or have been consulted for their National Air Pollution Control Program. Nevertheless, the answers to some of the survey questions show that the involvement of LRAs could be improved in order to ensure that their views and needs are taken into account. For example, 43% of the respondents neither contribute to the EIR report nor use it. The same percentage of respondents have not contributed to the Fitness Check on the AAQ Directives.

### **Problems with finding resources to deal with (new) responsibilities**

One recurrent and significant problem appears to be that of an imperfect allocation of resources between the different levels of government. The respondents are not fully satisfied with regard to the level of resources dedicated to the implementation of air quality policy at LRA level.

For this reason, it is particularly important to assess EU funding opportunities. ERDF, LIFE<sup>7</sup> and EAFRD appear to be the funds most commonly used by the respondents. Most of the funds are used for

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/action-programme/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/p2p/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/p2p/index_en.htm)

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/eir/index_en.htm)

<sup>7</sup> The question asked about "Instruments for the funding of environment and climate action such as the LIFE programme"

wider objectives benefitting also air quality. Only LIFE is indicated by a majority of its users as specifically used for air quality.

Moreover, there seem to be only limited forms of positive incentives or recognition for LRAs performing positively.

### **Success of local and regional initiatives and networks**

LRAs interest in air quality is also visible through their participation in multiple initiatives and networks that deal with climate policy or air quality policy. Only around 10% of respondents do not participate in any of the networks listed in Question 20.

Concerning the overall participation of the respondents in the initiatives listed in Question 19, the Covenant of Mayors<sup>8</sup> is the most frequently mentioned, followed by the Urban Agenda Partnership on Air Quality<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, for both, the participants indicated good added value.

Despite the difficulties for LRAs in attending international conferences, 14% of the respondents have participated in the Clean Air Forum<sup>10</sup> and 32% have used its materials.

Overall, the findings on LRA involvement in initiatives and networks are encouraging signs, although their active participation could be improved.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.covenantofmayors.eu/en/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/air-quality>

<sup>10</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/eu-clean-air-forum-2019-nov-28\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/eu-clean-air-forum-2019-nov-28_en)