

CODECIDDING
EUROPE

DIGIDEM

CITIZENS' RECOMMENDATIONS ON AIR QUALITY

FROM THE CODE EUROPE & DIGIDEM PROJECTS 2021-2023



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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the **first ever transnational crowdsourcing was held in 10 European cities on the topic of 'air quality'** – implementation of which was possible through the CODE Europe project, funded under the EEA grants, and the DigiDEM project, funded by the European Commission under the Europe for Citizens programme. The crowdsourcing started on 1 January 2022 and ran until 31 December 2022 and was conducted across Europe **to gather citizens' concerns and solutions to air pollution.**

Crowdsourcing is a digital participatory democracy tool that mobilises the 'wisdom of the crowd' to address public policy issues. It is an e-participation method that has the potential to improve representative democracy with more direct citizen engagement in decision-making processes. It can lead to policy perspectives that are closer to citizens' concerns and renews an essential promise of democracy: that citizens are not only heard but, above all, listened to in the development of public policies that affect them.

The crowdsourcing on air quality was implemented by a consortium of 15 partners (European NGOs, civic tech organisations, think tanks and a university), and took place online in **four phases.**

The first phase took place from January to April 2022 and focused on the **identification by citizens of problems linked to air pollution** in 10 different cities: Lisbon, Tallinn, Riga, Burgas, Athens, Budapest, Brussels, Podgorica, Amsterdam and Berlin.

The second phase took place from April to July 2022 and focused on **proposing solutions to the air quality problems** highlighted in the first phase.

The third phase from August to October 2022 had citizens **vote for the best solutions** to improve air quality at local, national and EU level between August and October.

Finally, the fourth phase from November to December 2022 took place at the European level and had **citizens drafting ten EU policy proposals** (based on the votes in Phase 3) together with experts to improve air quality.

In total, the crowdsourcing received **more than 4100 concrete contributions** on its digital platforms throughout these 4 Phases.

This report includes the final 10 top policy proposals for improving air quality at the EU level. Through our crowdsourcing process in the 10 cities, the priorities on how to tackle air pollution have been selected by citizens and elaborated upon together with environmental experts to produce this final policy document.

We are now calling upon the EU institutions and representatives to take into consideration the concerns and recommendations proposed by European citizens on this important issue that affects their daily lives.

The contributions were collected with the intention of helping political representatives (and other stakeholders) better understand what citizens think should be done when tackling air pollution and what policy priorities they want to see implemented on environmental issues. Citizens will be informed of the outcomes of their contributions to the different levels, including the European one.

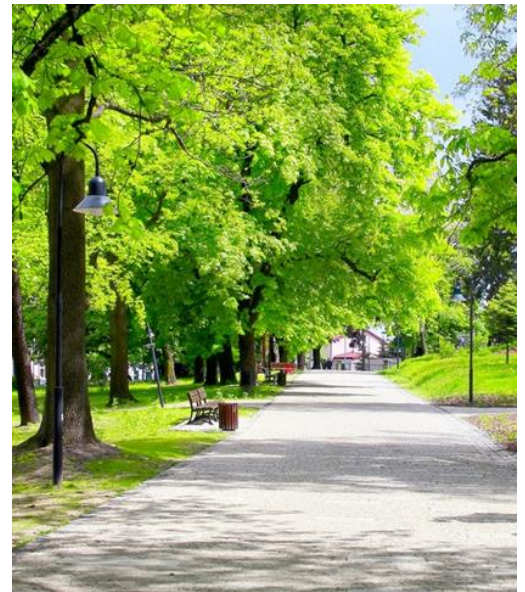
In the following sections, we list the top 10 citizen recommendations for improving air quality in Europe.

01

MORE GREEN SPACE IN CITIES

Urban planning is a city competence. While calling on local authorities to re-think the way in which urban space is used, finding ways to bring back nature in urban areas, and leaving cars out (car-free cities), citizens are also calling on the European institutions to launch a dedicated initiative to raise awareness about the benefits that green space has on citizens' health and on biodiversity; and to earmark funding for the development and maintenance of green spaces within cities. The demand for more green space in cities goes hand in hand with the demand to reduce the space that cars, and road traffic in general, have in urban settings. The development of green spaces (including subsidies for green roofs and local gardens) and the protection of existing ones are two key priorities. The WHO suggested that citizens should have at least 0.5ha of green space within 300m (5-minute walk) from home.

The EU institutions should therefore agree on a revised Ambient Air Quality Directive which is able to trigger such shift by: setting ambitious air quality standards and including effective enforcement and sanction regimes. An adoption of effective measures to reduce air pollution will be a priority.



02

INCREASED CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURES AND THEIR QUALITY



The European Environment Agency estimates that in the European Union, in 2020, 96% of the urban population was exposed to levels of fine particulate matter above the latest WHO Air Quality Guidelines; and that 89% was exposed to excess levels of nitrogen dioxide.

To reduce the percentages above, it is fundamental to promote and facilitate active mobility in urban areas: namely cycling and walking. To do so, the related infrastructure needs to be in place: if it is true that urban planning is a city's competence, important steps should be taken at the EU level to facilitate access to funding (in particular through the European Structural and Investment funds) for cities aiming at improving their existing cycling and walking infrastructures or to build new ones. Priority should be given to projects aiming to modernise and develop safe and permanent solutions that encourage citizens' choice to opt for active mobility. Recently, some steps in the right direction have been taken by the European Commission, which has developed a Guidance for Cycling Projects in the EU and has also announced the release of an EU Cycling Declaration, aiming at further supporting the uptake of cycling in the EU.

In February 2023 the European Parliament also agreed on a Resolution calling for the European Commission to develop a European cycling strategy with the aim of doubling the number of kilometres cycled in Europe by 2030.

Despite cities in the past being designed to accommodate road traffic, it is time for EU and local decision-makers to re-think how to best use urban space, giving it back to people and nature.

TAX BIG POLLUTERS (COMPANIES)



While it is key to prevent pollution, it is also important to guarantee the full implementation of the so-called polluter-pays principle, enshrined in EU law (Art. 191 TFEU, Directive 2008/50/EC, Directive 2002/49/EC), once air pollution has already been generated. The polluters should pay, through fines and penalties, for breaching air pollution-related legislation, while support is only given to activities that are coherent with the 'do no significant harm' approach. Money gathered through fines and penalties should be re-invested in air pollution prevention, air pollution reduction monitoring, enforcement promotion and potential remedies. Companies should be requested to publish an annual report on how much pollution they have generated in the previous calendar year and illustrate which remedial actions have been put in place since. Large companies should actively engage with relevant stakeholders (including youth representatives) to identify pollution-prevention techniques to be implemented and the related remedies.

EU decision-makers must agree on legislation which keep polluters accountable (e.g. developing economic instruments to incentivise air pollution reduction measures and penalise air pollution generation; requiring 0.1% levy on profits made by any polluting industrial sector - including chemicals, industrial farming, internal combustion engines automotive sector, fossil fuels energy production); and ensure that pollution monitoring and remediation costs are paid by polluters. The general public should not bear additional costs because of air pollution.

EU institutions must have a zero-tolerance attitude towards polluting economic actors and work for the full internalisation of pollution costs in any policy and finance framework. The full implementation of the polluter-pays principle constitutes an essential way to define a (economically) sustainable path towards zero-pollution, including air-pollution.

SUPPORT RENEWABLE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURES (E.G. SOLAR PANELS)

Clean renewable energy is the future, a no-regret choice for achieving clean air and climate objectives. Through the European Commission's proposed REPowerEU plan, the EU and national governments have the once-in-a-generation opportunity to expand their capacity to produce and use clean renewable energy (solar and wind), and to quickly achieve a fossil-free EU.

From making rooftop solar installations mandatory on new buildings (for all public and commercial buildings by 2027 and for new residential buildings by 2029) to proposing higher energy-saving targets, the European Commission's plan involves several positive initiatives to transform Europe's energy landscape in the right direction. Buildings, if equipped with photovoltaic panels (PV) will generate 25% of the EU's electricity consumption, according to the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. Citizens call on the European Parliament and national governments to support the uptake of solar power and complementary energy storage assets.

To further promote the installation of renewable energy infrastructure, EU and national decision-makers must support the establishment and facilitate the uptake of Renewable Energy Communities (RECs).

Citizens' involvement and buy-in during the development and implementation of renewable energy projects is essential: this approach will enhance cooperation between citizens and public authorities, reduce the risk of energy poverty and help balance social and economic divides. Energy produced by community-owned projects can lower the bills for everyone; in addition, RECs help raise awareness about energy consumption, thus leading to stronger energy efficiency and energy savings – which are fundamental to reduce air pollution.

Ownership models that promote justice and community control are also crucial to successfully support the uptake of clean renewable energy, as citizens have great benefits from being co-owners and co-producers, e.g. through revenues being re-invested in social and local services or the creation of local green jobs. In other words, renewable energy communities constitute a stimulus for better empowerment and democracy while tackling multiple crises, including the air pollution one.



STRENGTHEN PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK IN NON- URBAN AREAS



Citizens are highlighting the need for public transport infrastructure and further services in non-urban areas. The need for timely, efficient, affordable and regular connections between rural and urban areas should be considered a priority to both reduce air pollution and also to help ensure that citizens wanting to live in rural areas get access to fundamental public services such as public transport in order to commute to work or to school. More data sources, data collection methods and tools are needed to evaluate further the needs of citizens in different areas and tailor specific measures accordingly.

The EU institutions should provide financial support and dedicated expertise for the development of projects and infrastructures aiming at shortening the time spent to commute to work or to school from a non-urban area - therefore making the use of public transport an attractive option compared to cars. In parallel with public transport, also intermodal transport (car sharing, bike sharing) should be promoted. Moreover, accessibility could be improved through, for instance, single public transport card/account. The network and quality of the service could also be ameliorated by implementing specific measures such as the creation of bus and cycling lanes and more frequent services.

If more people can reach their urban destinations using public transport and not their car, there will be several resultant benefits: less cars in city streets, less congestion, reduced air and noise pollution, more space for nature and more space for people. All citizens – including those with mobility difficulties and low-income – will make the most of all these benefits.

06

ESTABLISH RULES TO GET ZERO- EMISSION INDUSTRIES



With the ongoing revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive, the European Parliament and Member States have a once-in-a-generation chance to establish strict rules to achieve the zero-pollution ambition that the European Commission has committed to within the European Green Deal. Zero-emission industries will not only benefit air quality, but also help Europe to achieve its climate neutrality objective.

Stricter technical measures to reduce air pollution from all industrial processes must be made mandatory. Pollution prevention measures must be prioritised ahead of end-of-pipe solutions, and the scope of the new Industrial Emissions Directive should be expanded, for example, by expanding the Best Available Techniques (BAT) to additional industrial sectors, such as industrial-scale farms (intensive rearing of cattle).

All industrial sectors must be included in the scope of the new Industrial Emissions Directive, including intensive agriculture plants.

BUILDING INSULATIONS

Domestic heating is the biggest source of particulate matter pollution in the EU: the burning of lignite, coal, biomass and other materials is contributing to more than 40% of total particulate matter emissions.

While it is fundamental to support the uptake of heat pumps as a cleaner option for generating heat in our homes, counting also on auto-produced solar energy, reducing air pollution from domestic heating starts with better insulating buildings. Energy savings always reduce air pollution.

Citizens are calling on EU decision-makers (including Member States sitting in the Council) to simplify and to privilege access to funding for renovating-building projects aiming at saving energy - which would reduce air pollution and benefit the climate. In addition, they call for taxes on renovation projects to be reduced, especially for low-income households. Attention should also be drawn to the importance of promoting building insulation through legislative instruments and policies which are not necessarily linked to the topic of energy consumption.



ELECTRIFYING BUS FLEETS

The electrification of public transport, in particular of bus fleets, must be seen as one of the important steps to be taken at city level to reduce air and noise pollution. While reducing the number of cars, to ensure car-free cities, coherent action must also be taken to secure zero-emission public transport. There is a highly effective way to clean up urban buses, by renewing existing fleets with zero-emission buses, which use battery electric or hydrogen technology (obtained from clean renewable sources).

Around 20 major European cities including Barcelona, Berlin, Madrid, Rome and Warsaw have already pledged to buy only zero-emission buses from 2025. These cities will join a similar number of cities that only procure zero-emission buses - a group that includes all Dutch cities, Denmark's six largest municipalities, Hamburg and London, among others.

As a result, zero-emission bus sales are growing. However, without action at EU level, demand for zero-emission urban buses will not be matched by supply. Constrained by a lack of availability, or prices that are too high due to an insufficient supply, cities will be forced to keep buying combustion engine buses. Financial support should be foreseen to help cities transition towards emission free buses. Therefore, citizens are calling on European decision-makers to cut air pollution, noise pollution and climate impacts by including a target for all new urban buses sales to be zero-emission from 2027 in the new Regulation on CO2 standards for new heavy-duty vehicles.



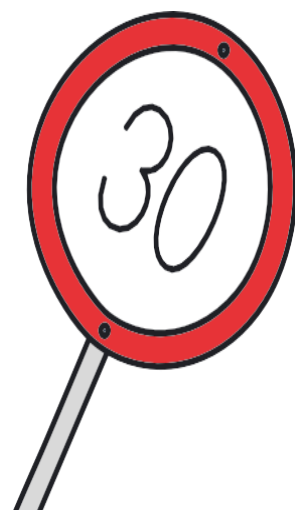
09

ESTABLISH A SPEED LIMIT OF 30 KM/H IN CITIES



Urban planning, including the definition of speed limits and proper road design, is a national/local competence. Despite this, while heading towards car-free cities, the European Union can support the uptake of a 30 km/h speed limit in cities. This effectively reduces air pollution as the intensity and frequency of accelerating and breaking are reduced, with both being important sources of particulate matter pollution and indirect source of nitrogen dioxide emissions. As a result, both biking and walking become safer.

The European institutions could provide technical assistance in the elaboration of such planning activities, as it is potentially the first step to take to transition to car-free cities. This represents an excellent example where measures deriving from citizen involvement would help to choose the best solutions to be implemented, for instance thanks to information and best practices collected by citizens from other countries.



WORKSHOPS AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS TO INCREASE AWARENESS ABOUT AIR POLLUTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

In line with the Council of the European Union's Recommendation on learning for the green transition and sustainable development, adopted on 16 June 2022, it is important to acknowledge that education plays a fundamental role in promoting awareness and understanding about air pollution impacts on health and the environment. Moreover, education can support the learning actions that citizens can take to prevent and reduce air pollution. Civic education plays an integral role in environmental protection as well (so-called Environmental Citizenship).

Citizens have identified the need for EU decision-makers, including national governments represented by the Council, to develop dedicated educational trainings on the topic. Next to promoting the inclusion of air quality and environmental protection in schools' programmes, the need for specific workshops targeting adults has also emerged.



Citizens call on the European Commission and Members of the European Parliament to co-organise, with national government representatives, national workshops dedicated to air quality (along the Clean Air Dialogues). In addition, citizens call for decision-makers to elaborate a workshop format for disseminating key information: to be used by schoolteachers and professors willing to contribute to their students' awareness; and by local decision-makers and NGOs to raise awareness among adults and to build knowledge of media actors. Decision-makers should also properly enable and support citizens' participation in relevant processes, as already demanded by law.

Access to funding (e.g. LIFE Programme) should be prioritised when the main objective of the project seeking financial support is to raise awareness and inform the public about air pollution issues.





CODE Europe (funded by the EEA grants) is a project about empowering citizens to co-create policies with decision makers through crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is a participatory democracy mechanism that takes advantage of the availability of technological solutions to solicit and analyse “the wisdom of the crowd”. We want to empower citizens by giving them the opportunity to learn from each other, collaborate and participate in decision-making.



DIGIDEM

DIGITAL DEMOCRATIC
EMPOWERMENT AND
MOBILISATION FOR A
STRONGER EU (DIGIDEM)

DigiDEM (funded by the European Union) applies collaborative methods of crowdsourcing legislation and ‘social listening’ in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and Montenegro on the subject of ‘air quality’ – a topic chosen because of its transnational nature and the problems associated with it (estimated 400 000 premature deaths in Europe each year). It sets to ensure that the collected citizens’ contributions on the topic feed into and impact EU policy-making.



MORE INFORMATION

codecidingeurope.eu
ecas.org/projects/digidem/

The CODE Europe project benefits from a €1 316 367,00 grant from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway through the EEA and Norway Grants Fund for Regional Cooperation. The aim of the project is to develop and test in real life an innovative model for citizen engagement in public policy participation and digital democracy.