02. AIR QUALITY

POLICY & LEGISLATIVE DEVELOPMENTS

The adoption and implementation of regulations related to air quality heavily depend on other sectors, primarily energy, transport and industry. There is a clear need for strong cross-sectoral cooperation in order to implement reforms related to air quality. However, due to a lack of political commitment and strategic planning by the government, action by the various sectors relevant to air quality continues to be incoherent, particularly the energy sector.

Regarding the strategic framework, Serbia still lacks a national Air Protection Strategy. The Ministry of Environmental Protection has stated that work on this document has not yet begun.

The key Directive (2008/50 / EC) relating to air quality has largely been transposed into Serbian legislation. However, the process is not yet complete.

The current status of the National Program for gradual reduction of annual emissions of certain polluting substances and progress toward establishing a mechanism for the implementation of the Monitoring Mechanism Regulation (MMR) are described in the horizontal legislation, industrial pollution and climate change sections of this report.

Air quality plans for the agglomerations of Belgrade and Pančevo were adopted during 2016. However, air quality plans for the towns of Smederevo, Valjevo and Užice have still not been developed, despite air quality in these locations being in the worst category; the local public administration in all three of these locations lacks the necessary human and financial capacity to implement air quality plans. In Užice work on developing an air quality plan has begun. In Smederevo no reliable air quality data is available.

There was no revision of zones and agglomerations in the Republic of Serbia. At the time of the preparation of this report (first half of October 2017), the Air Quality Report for the Republic of Serbia for 2016 had still not yet been published[13].

IMPLEMENTATION

Air quality in the Republic of Serbia continues to be one of the most complex problems in the environmental sector, with a direct impact on public health. Air quality is steadily declining. The system for monitoring air quality has been inadequately maintained in recent years. Encouragingly, funding to repair the air quality monitoring system was allocated in the state budget at the beginning 2017. In April 2017, the Air Quality Department of the Environmental Protection Agency began necessary maintenance and renewal of the network of automatic monitoring stations. It is expected that about 60% of the malfunctions affecting the network should be resolved by the end of 2017.

13 The Environmental Protection Agency published the Report on 24 October 2017.

The biggest challenges related to the implementation of regulations on air quality are monitoring and the public availability of relevant information.

The quality and validity of data from the national network of automatic stations for air quality monitoring are still not satisfactory, primarily due to the failure to properly maintain the measuring equipment. We remind that in 2015 only 25% of data from the national network of automatic monitoring stations was recognized as valid[14]. Further, online real time reports from the automatic monitoring network deviate from the actual time by several hours and reports from some measuring points are not provided, without any explanation[15]. The Annual Environmental Agency's Environmental Report for 2016 was not available to the public during the preparation of this report; it is therefore not yet known what proportion of the data collected in 2016 are valid.

The number of sites for the sampling and measurement of heavy metals and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in Serbia has not been increased. Also, only a very small number of stations perform pollution measurements at intersections of roads in urban areas, despite the constant increase in the number of vehicles and the expected inflow of vehicles using diesel from the EU.

There is still no accredited laboratory in the country for the calibration of air quality monitoring devices used in the national monitoring network, despite plans to do so being set out in the Post-Screening Document for Chapter 27[16].

In addition to sources of pollution such as thermal power plants, transport, industry and domestic fireplaces, air quality throughout the country is additionally impacted on by frequent fires at sanitary and illegal landfill sites. In the last seven months, as a result of poor landfill and waste management, the number of fires and explosions in sanitary and illegal landfill sites across Serbia has increased, including fires at sites in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, Jagodina, Bajmok, and Čelarevo.

Fires at sanitary and illegal landfill sites dramatically affect air quality. The fire at the Vinča landfill site, which is near the largest agglomeration in Serbia (the city of Belgrade), directly threatened the air quality in the most populated municipalities in the country. The Vinča landfill fire, which began on the 18th of April, 2017, took twenty-four days to bring under control. The fire has continued deep underground (20-30m) and continues to release harmful substances. Institutions responsible for monitoring air pollution issued a statement stating that particles released during the fire at the Vinča landfill are not harmful to health and that the concentrations of pollutant particles were at safe levels. It should be noted that information on the changed composition of the particles was not released, even though they were within the allowed limits. The Belgrade Faculty of Chemistry has publically warned that the state does not have specialised equipment for measuring substances released by fires at landfill sites, such as PCDFs and PCDDs[17]. The cumulative effects of emissions from prolonged fires have been completely ignored.

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14 http://www.sepa.gov.rs/download/VAZDUH2015.pdf

15 http://www.amskv.sepa.gov.rs/stanicepodaci.php

16 http://www.pregovarackagrupa27.gov.rs/?wpfb_dl=69

The assessment of air quality based on data collected at existing air monitoring stations indicates that concentrations of pollutants in Serbia, especially solid matter, very often exceed levels that are safe for human health.

The concentration of carcinogenic particulate matter is measured at an insufficient number of the automatic monitoring stations in the country. In the last five years, PM10 particles were measured at only 35 of the 45 monitoring stations in the national monitoring network, with long periods –in some cases a year– when measurements were not taken. Only three stations (two in Belgrade and one in Novi Sad) are capable of measuring PM2.5 particles, and only one of these worked without interruption during the last five years. Such interruptions have resulted in the inadequate monitoring of air quality trends and have jeopardized the accuracy of assessments of the impact of air pollution on human health in Serbia.

The official annual SEPA report on air quality in the Republic of Serbia for 2015 noted that the failure to properly maintain air quality monitoring equipment, which worked continuously (without a pause) from 2010 to 2015, resulted in insufficient valid data to assess air quality in three agglomerations.

The practice of recording air quality data using accredited manual methods has continued. The Law on Air Protection clearly states that valid air quality data can only be obtained using the automatic measurement method. For this reason, air quality data for large portions of the country are not reported in official statistics, preventing realistic insight into air quality in areas that are not covered by automatic monitoring stations.

The public availability of information about air quality remains restricted. Particularly problematic is the publication of monthly air quality reports on the official websites of cities and municipalities. These reports are released a month after measurements are taken, are commonly posted in hard-to access sub-domains, and often lack narrative explanations about what the data means. When data is displayed in this way, it is difficult to find and interpret. Consequently, it is very difficult for members of the public to monitor local air quality.

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=546&v=CrXxAMPMh2M