

Cities in Eastern Europe, where coal is still the main source of energy, have gone through the worst of all, with the most polluted air in the Polish city of Nowy Sącz, followed by Cremona in Italy and Slavonski Brod in Croatia, writes The Guardian.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) took data from 323 cities in 2019 and 2020 and found that only in 127 of these cities, or about 40%, is the level of tiny PM2.5 particles below the level recommended by the World Health Organization. Tiny floating particles have a major impact on health and cause more than 400,000 premature deaths a year across Europe.

The data show an average over a two-year period and are only available for cities that have consistently submitted air pollution reports, so not all European cities are covered. The report does not include the UK, as the government there has stepped out of the environmental oversight body, although members and countries outside the European Union, such as Turkey, Switzerland and Norway.

The European Environment Agency said lockdown measures during the pandemic led to a large reduction in carbon dioxide levels, which is caused by the combustion of diesel fuel, but fine particulate matter levels remained high. Nitrogen dioxide levels fell in some cities by 60% during the lockdown in April 2020, but the reduction in fine particulate matter was not as significant, only a decrease in larger particle (PM 10) levels was recorded last April. The agency's experts said that this is because there are many sources of fine particles, not only related to road transport, but include the combustion of heating fuels, such as wood and heavy oils, and in agriculture, ammonia emissions from fertilizers that combine with other pollutants in the atmosphere and create particles.

Catherine Ganzleben, head of the EEA group for air pollution, environment and health, said changes in behavior triggered by the covid pandemic could have an impact in the future. "If people choose teleworking instead of everyday commuting, it will disrupt pollution patterns," she said.

The new pollution data will be available via an internet browser that will allow people to compare data in their cities with others across Europe.

- Although air quality has improved significantly in recent years, air pollution remains at stubbornly high levels in many European cities. An online air quality browser will allow citizens to easily check how their city stands compared to others. It will provide concrete and local information that will empower local people in relation to local authorities to solve problems, said Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director.

At the end of March, the European Parliament called for a revision of existing EU air quality standards and the introduction of stricter controls on the implementation of air quality

improvement measures in member states.

The report on the implementation of the air quality audit directives, adopted by MEPs, focuses on two air quality directives setting air quality standards and provisions that ensure that all Member States monitor and assess air quality in a harmonized way.

The report estimates that in the period 2000-2018, there has been an overall reduction in emissions thanks to EU policies, which has led to a significant decoupling of emissions from economic activity, but that air quality has not improved to the same extent and continues to have a serious impact on human health and the environment. to ensure the health of European citizens and the environment.

Source: jutarnji.hr