

Official data confirm that Bor is among the most polluted places in Serbia – in 2019, air quality in this city was the worst, in the third category. According to the Report of the Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), in 2019, Kraljevo, Zajecar, Valjevo, Subotica, Novi Sad, Belgrade, Pancevo, Smederevo, Uzice, Nis, Pozarevac and the municipalities of Kosjeric and Beocin were in the same category. It's not the first time for most.

Therefore, the Law on Air Protection stipulates that these, but also other local governments in which there is constant air pollution or measures taken do not give results, develop a so-called air quality plan (PKV). These plans should contain information on the source of pollution as well as a list of measures planned to reduce pollution.

However, according to the data obtained by CINS, these plans were adopted by less than half of the cities and municipalities that had that obligation, and those that have them do not record an improvement in 2019.

"I feel sorry for everyone who has to stay here and get poisoned," Dragan Novakovic wrote on his Facebook profile at the end of August. He thus informed his friends that he was moving from Bor with his family.

Novakovic lived in this city for 15 years. For the Center for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (CINS), he says that the reason for the relocation is only one – air pollution. He can't remember the exact day they decided to move out, but he remembers the terrible pollution. "There was so much pollution that we couldn't open the windows at all. If you go outside and breathe in that polluted air, it just didn't make sense to think about staying there. You know, you think something will happen, someone will notice it and it will stop – but it seems not. "

Most people have no alternative, nowhere to go, adds Novakovic:

"They are where they are, they are poisoned and what will they do? They have no other way out. "

In order to ensure better air quality, municipalities and cities where pollution is too high are obliged to adopt an air quality plan and determine measures to solve the problem. Most have not done so to date, according to data obtained by CINS. However, even in places that have these plans, the air has officially worsened, which CINS interlocutors assess differently: either the measures are not implemented properly or there is not enough money to implement all the measures.

Vesna Mitrovic, head of the Department for Air Protection and the Ozone Layer at the Ministry of Environmental Protection, told CINS that, although local governments are required by law to develop air quality plans, there is no clearly set deadline by which they must do so. As he says, he counts on conscience and the need for every local self-

government to have the best possible air quality.

Despite the plans, the cities remain excessively polluted

The City of Novi Sad adopted the PKV for the period from 2017 to 2021, within which there are also short-term measures (KAP). However, although the citizens of Novi Sad enjoyed the period of clean and moderately polluted air for the first two years, their city was again on the list of the most polluted in 2019, SEPA data show.

The City Administration for Environmental Protection cited unfavorable weather conditions as the reason for the deterioration for CINS, which, along with increased traffic, individual fireplaces and burning of stubble in the fields, led to exceeding the allowed values of PM10 particles during the winter. In addition, they explain that all the envisaged measures from the PCV have been implemented or the implementation has begun, that they plan to implement long-term measures continuously from year to year and that they will develop a special PAK.

Bor residents are in a similar situation, which, although they have had an Air Quality Plan since 2013, only in the period 2016-2018. breathe clean or slightly polluted air, according to SEPA data. In 2019, they entered the third category again, because the concentration of sulfur dioxide in the center of Bor was “dangerous to human health” 13 times, which CINS wrote about. Previously, the Bor mining basin (RTB) was privatized by the Chinese company Zidjin Bor Koper, which was convicted in the first instance in July 2020 for pollution. In the first 15 days of September 2020, the same thing happened six times at the same measuring point.

Unlike Novi Sad, the PAK, which is supposed to plan concrete measures in cases of exceeding the limit values in Bor, has not yet been adopted. While the Ministry says that they were not satisfied with the draft plan, which is why they sent them numerous remarks, the Bor City Administration did not answer CINS ‘questions about why the air quality situation in that city deteriorated in 2019 and at what stage is the development KAP. The state of air quality in other cities that have long-term PKV in 2019 was of the third category.

Ognjan Pantic from the Belgrade Open School (BOS) warns that it is questionable whether the air in Bor and Novi Sad in previous years was really of the first category. CINS previously wrote that some cities were marked as unpolluted because there was not enough data from the measuring stations.

Pantic says that, if we look at what the developed plans contain, everyone could find a flaw, because there is no detailed data on emissions, pollution sources and concretized measures.

The problem, he believes, is that the plans are not implemented or, if they are respected but do not give results, because they do not target the sectors from which the pollution primarily comes.

Vesna Mitrovic reminds that the law says that every local self-government implements measures depending on its financial possibilities, because “every measure requires some financial support”.

While Pantic estimates that the implementation of the measures is not monitored enough, the Ministry says that every spring they ask the local municipalities what it has done in the past year.

Source: cins.rs