

(English version)

Question for written answer E-000300/25
to the Commission
Dan-Ștefan Motreanu (PPE)
(23 January 2025)

Subject: Addressing noise pollution in low-emission zones: challenges and solutions

A recent report from the European Court of Auditors (ECA) highlights a critical challenge in urban pollution management. While low-emission zones (LEZs) in cities such as Athens, Barcelona or Kraków have successfully reduced air pollution and noise within the designated LEZs, they have inadvertently caused an increase in noise and pollution levels in surrounding streets.

In Barcelona, for example, traffic restrictions led to a 33% increase in commercial activities, such as bars and restaurants, in pedestrian zones, which have become significant sources of noise pollution, particularly at night. This unintended consequence underlines the complexity of urban environmental management.

The report also notes that noise pollution, primarily from motor traffic, is a significant yet often overlooked issue in urban areas. Prolonged exposure to environmental noise is associated with serious health risks, including cardiovascular diseases and chronic stress. Despite the EU's Green Deal targeting a reduction in the number of citizens chronically exposed to noise by 2030, the ECA found significant gaps in monitoring data among Member States, making it difficult to measure progress effectively.

What measures does the Commission intend to propose to ensure better monitoring of noise pollution and to address the displacement effects of LEZs on surrounding urban areas?

Submitted: 23.1.2025

Answer given by Ms Roswall on behalf of the European Commission
(10 March 2025)

The Environmental Noise Directive (END) ⁽¹⁾ requires Member States to adopt strategic noise maps showing noise exposure in major agglomerations, along major railways, major roads and around major airports.

These maps serve as a basis for developing noise action plans. The Commission is committed to seeking to improve the implementation of the END ⁽²⁾.

Also, the Commission agreed to assess the feasibility of introducing EU noise-reduction targets and noise limits in the END, and aligning the noise exposure reporting thresholds as closely as possible with those recommended by the World Health Organisation, as recommended by the European Court of Auditors ⁽³⁾.

The Commission will continue to foster exchanges of good practices between competent authorities via the TAIEX-EIR tool ⁽⁴⁾. In October 2024, the Commission opened six infringement procedures related to non-reporting of noise maps ⁽⁵⁾. The Commission may take further steps should the Member States' remedial action be deemed unsatisfactory.

Regarding possible displacement effects caused by low-emission zones (LEZs) on surrounding urban areas, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, relevant Member States authorities are fully responsible for establishing these zones, as no EU law exists that mandates them.

The Ambient Air Quality Directive ⁽⁶⁾ and the END leave the choice of measures to the Member States, which are tasked with finding a balance between competing priorities.

The New EU Urban Mobility Package ⁽⁷⁾ and its concept for Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans encourage cities to plan comprehensively for transport; by integrating LEZs into broader mobility strategies, cities can balance emissions reduction efforts with the needs of surrounding areas.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2002/49/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 June 2002 relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise, OJ L 189 18.7.2002, p. 12.

⁽²⁾ As noted in its 2023 Implementation Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the Implementation of the Environmental Noise Directive in accordance with Article 11 of Directive 2002/49/EC, 20.3.2023.

⁽³⁾ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR-2025-02>

⁽⁴⁾ https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review/peer-2-peer_en

⁽⁵⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/inf_24_4561

⁽⁶⁾ Directive (EU) 2024/2881 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2024 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (recast), OJ L, 2024/2881, 20.11.2024, as well as its predecessors Directive 2004/107/EC and 2008/50/EC.

⁽⁷⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions — The New EU Urban Mobility Framework (COM(2021) 811/2).