

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-001069/26
to the Commission**

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(16 March 2026)

Subject: Low emission zones

In Spain, the Law on Climate Change requires low emission zones (LEZs) to be established in municipalities with over 50 000 residents with the aim of restricting city-centre access for the most polluting vehicles.

That measure has been adopted without taking into account the reality in Spain, where the average age of cars is among the highest in the European Union. In 2024, vehicles had a mean age of 14.5 years, while more than 62% of passenger cars had passed the ten-year mark. In addition, electric vehicles accounted for less than 5% of total sales.

The implementation of the LEZs is causing social concerns. Most households cannot afford to replace their car, which results in disproportionate restrictions and turns access to city centres into a luxury.

1. Can the Commission confirm that establishing LEZs is not an obligation directly imposed by the European Union, but rather a decision taken by the Member States?
2. What instruments, recommendations or support programmes does the Commission provide to Member States to improve air quality without creating or exacerbating social inequalities?

Submitted: 16.3.2026

Answer given by Mr Tzitzikostas on behalf of the European Commission
(13 May 2026)

The Ambient Air Quality Directive (AAQD) ⁽¹⁾ requires Member States to ensure that concentrations of air pollutants do not exceed the EU limit values, *inter alia* for nitrogen oxides (NO_x) and for particulate matter (PM).

To that end, Member States must keep any period of exceedance of these limit values as short as possible. The transport sector is the largest contributor to NO_x emissions and a major contributor to PM emissions.

The revised AAQD ⁽²⁾ provides for an indicative list of air pollution abatement measures including the establishment of urban vehicle access regulations, including low- and zero-emission zones.

The selection of appropriate measures to mitigate air pollution in urban areas falls within the discretion of the Member States and is not imposed by the Commission.

This approach complies with the principle of subsidiarity, which ensures that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizens and that there is a continuous review of whether action at EU level is justified in the light of the possibilities available at national, regional or local level.

Air quality is mainstreamed in many EU funding programmes ⁽³⁾. EU funding for air quality is allocated in accordance with the scope and objectives of the respective programmes but also considering the EU air quality legislation and any programmes ⁽⁴⁾ developed to address national, regional or local needs.

EU funding prioritises the needs of vulnerable groups following the obligation stemming from the directives to assess the social dimensions of air pollution as well as the socioeconomic impacts of mitigation measures.

⁽¹⁾ Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2008 on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe, OJ L 152, 11.6.2008, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2008/50/oj>.

⁽²⁾ 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, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/2881/oj>.

⁽³⁾ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/horizontal-priorities/green-budgeting/clean-air-tracking_en.

⁽⁴⁾ E.g. Air Quality Plans and Air Quality Roadmaps under the Ambient Air Quality Directive (EU) 2024/2881 and National Air Pollution Control Programmes under the National Emission reduction Commitments Directive (EU) 2016/2284.