



AIR QUALITY IN CATALONIA: SHORTCOMINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

EXECUTIVE REPORT

JUNE 2019

SÍNDIC

EL DEFENSOR
DE LES
PERSONES

REPORT ON
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CATALONIA:
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Concern for air quality has been a growing phenomenon in Catalonia in recent years. The situation of pollution in cities, alerted by European community bodies, and also the concern for emissions from the traffic of authorized vehicles and the industrial and port sector, have placed this issue at the centre of the environmental debate in Catalonia.

Closely linked to air pollution, there is odour pollution, which is the subject of complaints in this institution, mainly due to unpleasant odours of the industries and activities. In general, the industries actively affect the air pollution by the emissions of gases with greenhouse effect. Reducing these emissions and promoting a neutral economy in emissions are the objectives that must be achieved in the fight against climate change.

As a result of these concerns, the Catalan Ombudsman submitted to the Parliament of Catalonia a monographic report entitled *Air quality in Catalonia: shortcomings and recommendations*, with the goal of analysing the public policies promoted in Catalonia in terms of air quality, determining their compliance with the European and international guidelines, and studying possible threats, weaknesses, opportunities and strengths in this field to identify the needs that must be covered by the Administration.

In the report the Catalan Ombudsman points out that it is strictly necessary for the Public Administration to take the initiative in the adoption of measures that help to reduce pollution and that all work together to find solutions. The sanctioning procedures carried out by the European Commission confirm these needs, as well as the weaknesses of the existing air pollution prevention system. As early as 2014, the European Commission warned Spain that it did not protect citizens against pollution by fine particles and called on all the Member States to act in a forward-looking, fast and effective manner, so failure to comply was as short as possible.

In Catalonia, in March 2015, as a result of a resolution of the Parliament of Catalonia, the Territorial Table on Air Quality in the Camp of Tarragona was created. The purpose of the Table is to exchange information about air quality and the effects of emissions from chemical industries on people's health, in order to adjust surveillance and search for the effects on human health of the main pollutants in the petrochemicals and improve transparency.

On October 19th, 2015, the Air Quality Board of the Conurbation of Barcelona was established, which assumed the responsibilities and functions of the Institutional Commission of the Action Plan for the improvement of air quality, Horizon 2020, as a transversal body in which all sectors, social agents, institutions, public and private organizations involved or interested in reducing air pollution in this area are working together.

The Barcelona City Council also launched a program with 58 structural measures to fight against air pollution, which must be carried out between 2017-2020. In addition, it also adopted a protocol in cases of an environmental pollution episode. This makes evident the political will of the administrations to work on improving the air quality. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Catalan Ombudsman considers that measures are still insufficient and that some of them have significant shortcomings, which is confirmed by the current levels of pollution.

Promote a transport and sustainable mobility policy, in order to reverse the current situation of prevalence of private vehicles in transport and mobility policies; improve the connection of the public transport network in the metropolitan area to favour the connections between the municipalities of the conurbation and the city and the putting into operation of a new system of all-in-one pass for the use of public transport (T-Mobility) are some of the measures to be taken to encourage the use of public transport instead of private vehicles.

Another recommendation of the Catalan Ombudsman implies the decisive promotion of actions to foster the use of electric vehicles, creating a sufficient network of recharging points in the city and supporting, with benefits, the purchase and replacement of conventional vehicles with this type of vehicle.

Regarding the restrictions on the movement of vehicles in cases of high pollution episodes, the Catalan Ombudsman understands that they are occasional measures and, beyond that, it is necessary for the administrations to make long-term policies that allow people to know in advance decisions in this field affecting their daily lives.

Restrict access to the most polluted areas, such as districts and areas of the city of Barcelona and other municipalities, and also the possibility of closing them on alternate or permanent days during working days, together with the the impulse of the park and ride in the metropolitan area, which in any case should be close to the railway or railway stations and the entrances to the areas defined by Barcelona's Metropolitan Area following technical analyses, are other recommendations of the report.

Finally, the report also refers to odour contamination to show that there is still no regulatory regulation in this matter today, and that the only initiatives were a draft bill of law against pollution odoriferous, submitted by the Department of the Environment and Housing in 2005, and Resolution 403 / XI, of December 14, 2016, of the Parliament of Catalonia, which called for the inclusion of specific regulations to fight against odour problems in the framework of the future law of environmental quality.

MAIN SUMMARIZED RECOMMENDATIONS

- Public authorities must promote a transport and sustainable mobility policy that prioritizes public transport instead of private vehicles.
- It is necessary to improve the connection in the public transport network in the metropolitan area of Barcelona, to favour the connections between the municipalities of the conurbation and the city centre.
- Unify the criteria regarding bonuses and gratuity of the transport titles, which should be the same throughout the metropolitan area.
- Promote actions to encourage the use of electric vehicles. On the one hand, creating a sufficient network of recharging points in the city and, on the other, supporting with benefits the purchase and replacement of conventional vehicles with this type of vehicle.
- Although the air quality control, monitoring and information mechanisms have been improving, it is necessary to promote an integration of the information, as well as an extension of the type of information provided (which integrates immissions and emissions).
- Authorities must favour and encourage the awareness and participation of citizens, and make the information available to everyone. Likewise, this information must be clear and understandable.
- It is necessary for the administrations to make long-term policies that allow people to know enough time in this area that most can affect their daily lives.
- In accordance with the highest levels of pollution in some districts and areas of the city of Barcelona and other municipalities, it is necessary to assess restricting access to these more polluted areas, and also the possibility of closing them in alternate or permanent days during business days.

- Create a congestion toll. Apply a daily rate that must be paid to drive within the areas established by the metropolitan area. This toll operates in fifteen cities in five European countries.
- Promote park & ride in the metropolitan area. They need to be close to the train or train stations and the entrances to the metropolitan area.
- The approval of a specific regulation on odour pollution is necessary.

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