

National Emission Ceilings (NEC) Directive

National Emission reduction Commitments Directive reporting status 2020



This briefing presents progress made by the EU and its Member States¹ towards meeting the 2010 emission ceilings that were applicable until the end of 2019 under Directive 2016/2284/EU — the National Emission reduction Commitments (NEC) Directive — on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants. In addition, it assesses the emission reduction effort — compared with 2018 emissions levels — required by each country to comply with the 2020 and 2030 reduction commitments set out in the Directive.

Key messages

In 2018, the EU met the 2010 emission ceilings set for total emissions of four main air pollutants: nitrogen oxides (NO_x), non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs), sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and ammonia (NH₃).

EU emissions of NH₃ plateaued after five consecutive years of increased emissions from 2013 to 2017. While emissions fell by 1.5 % from 2017 to 2018, emission levels in 2018 were higher than in 2010.

In 2018, five Member States exceeded their 2010 national emission ceilings for NH₃, while one also exceeded its NMVOC ceiling.

Since 2016, all Member States have been in compliance with their national emission ceilings for NO_x and SO₂.

The majority of Member States and the United Kingdom must make additional efforts to reduce emission levels to meet their 2020 reduction commitments. Reductions in economic activity across Europe in 2020 associated with the COVID-19 lockdowns is expected to lower emissions and may boost progress towards meeting reduction commitments.

All EU Member States will need to reduce their NO_x emissions, moreover half of them will need to reduce fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) emissions by more than 30 % below 2018 levels to achieve the 2030 reduction commitments.

Comparison of Member States' emissions with the NEC Directive ceilings

Air pollution continues to be one of the major challenges in Europe ¹, harming human health and the environment. It contributes to respiratory problems, shortening lives and increasing medical costs. Air pollution also causes the eutrophication of ecosystems and reduces agricultural yields. In addition, certain air pollutants act as greenhouse gases (GHGs) and drive climate change (EEA, 2019).

In 2018, all Member States were in compliance with NO_x and SO₂ emission ceilings.

NH₃ emissions stopped increasing after five consecutive years of emissions level increases (2013-2017).

Five Member States have NH₃ emissions higher than their ceilings.

The NEC Directive (EU, 2016) ensured that the emission ceilings for 2010 (established under the 2001 NEC Directive) remained applicable until the end of 2019. New emission reduction commitments apply for 2020-2029 and for 2030 onwards. Under the new directive, Member States report annual emission inventory information from 1990 — or from 2000 in the case of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) — to 2 years before the present. The analysis presented here is based on the latest air pollutant emissions inventory data for the period 2010-2018, as reported by Member States in February 2020. The briefing also provides an assessment of the emission reductions against 2018 emission

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levels that are required for Member States and the United Kingdom to meet their respective 2020 and 2030 reduction commitments.

Emission levels for the four main air pollutants (NH₃, NMVOC, NO_x and SO₂) across the EU have been well below the emission ceilings since 2012.

Table 1 provides an overview of progress towards meeting 2010 emission ceilings for four key pollutants for 2010-2018, both for EU Member States and for the EU-28. The NEC Directive does not include a 2010 ceiling for PM_{2.5}.

25 Member States lowered their PM_{2.5} emissions between 2017 and 2018.

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Table 1. EU Member States' progress towards meeting 2010 NEC Directive emission ceilings

Country Name	NH3								NMVOC								NOx								SO2											
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
EU28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Belgium	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bulgaria	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Croatia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyprus	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Czechia	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Denmark	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Finland	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
France	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Germany	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Greece	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ireland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Latvia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lithuania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Malta	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Netherlands	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Poland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Romania	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Slovakia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spain	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Sweden	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
United Kingdom	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Above	6	5	4	4	5	5	6	5	5	6	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	13	8	7	2	1	1												
Below	21	22	23	23	23	23	22	23	23	21	25	26	25	27	27	27	27	27	14	19	20	25	27	27	28	28	28	27	27	27	27	28	28	28	28	28

Notes:



indicates that the emission ceiling has been met.



indicates that the emission ceiling has not been met.

The compliance check against current emission ceilings takes into account adjustment applications approved by the European Commission in 2019; new adjustment applications submitted in 2020 are not taken into account (see Box 1). All adjustment applications will be reviewed by the Commission. If approved, the number of Member States exceeding one or more emission ceilings could change. Resubmissions reported by 5th June have been taken into account.

Box 1. 'Adjustments' to emission inventories under the National Emission reduction Commitments Directive

Consistent with a similar procedure agreed by parties to the Gothenburg Protocol of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution, the National Emission reduction Commitments Directive (Article 5) establishes a process that allows Member States to 'adjust' their emission inventories downwards if non-compliance with the national ceilings is caused by Member States having applied emission inventory methods that have subsequently been updated in accordance with new scientific knowledge available since the 2010 ceilings were originally set.

Member States wishing to adjust their data in this way must first notify the European Commission (by 15 February each year) and subsequently submit a range of documentation (by 15 March each year) for review.

Adjustment applications for sub-sectors and pollutants that were approved by the Commission in 2019 are taken into account in the present note, so that it is possible to identify whether ceilings have been respected.

However, new adjustment applications submitted in 2020 are currently under evaluation and are not taken into account here. **The number of ceilings exceeded by Member States given here is, therefore, still subject to change.**

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Ammonia (NH₃)

Five Member States, namely Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Ireland and Spain, exceeded their NH₃ ceilings in 2018. The highest exceedances, in percentage terms, were reported for Spain (33 %) and Germany (19 %). Denmark reported the lowest exceedance, at less than 1 %. Germany was the largest emitter of NH₃, followed by France and Spain.

Between 2017 and 2018, 22 EU Member States reported emission reductions for NH₃. This translated into an overall reduction in EU emissions of 1.5 % — the first decrease seen since 2013.

Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs)

In 2018, only Czechia exceeded its national ceiling for NMVOCs, by 5 %. Germany was the largest emitter of NMVOCs in 2018, followed by Italy and the United Kingdom.

Following a small increase of around 1 % in EU emissions of NMVOCs from 2016 to 2017, in 2018 emissions fell by 2 %. Overall, emissions of NMVOCs have fallen by 30 % since 2005.

Nitrogen oxides (NO_x)

Since 2016, all Member States have been in compliance with their NO_x emission ceilings. The overall emission reduction from 2005 levels is about 40 %, with a reduction of about 4 % from 2017 and 2018.

In absolute terms, Germany was the largest emitter of NO_x in 2018, followed by the United Kingdom and Poland.

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Sulphur dioxide (SO₂)

In 2018, all Member States were in compliance with their emission ceilings for SO₂. Poland was the largest emitter of SO₂, followed by Germany and Spain.

From 2017 to 2018, almost all Member States (24 out of 28) reported emission reductions, translating into an aggregate reduction of 6 %. EU emissions of SO₂ have fallen by 75 % since 2005.

Fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5})

The NEC Directive does not include a 2010 ceiling for primary PM_{2.5}. Italy was the largest emitter of PM_{2.5} in 2018, followed by France and Poland.

From 2017 to 2018, 25 Member States reported reduced emissions of PM_{2.5}, delivering an overall EU reduction of 4 %. EU emissions of PM_{2.5} have fallen by 26 % since 2005.

Further effort is needed to meet national emission reduction commitments for 2020 and 2030

The NEC Directive ensured that the 2010 emission ceilings applied until the end of 2019. The collective efforts of Member States have resulted in total EU emissions of the four main pollutants (NO_x, NMVOC, NH₃ and SO₂) being well below their respective ceilings for every year since 2012. Nevertheless, progress so far is insufficient to reach the more ambitious emission reduction commitments set for the period 2020-2029 and even more so for 2030 onwards.

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Table 2 shows the percentage reductions against 2018 emission levels² required for Member States and the United Kingdom to reach their emission reduction commitments. The emission reduction is calculated as the percentage difference between 2018 reported emissions and the emission reduction commitments for 2020 and 2030.

Countries are divided into five groups:

- countries where current emission levels are below the emission reduction commitment
- countries that need to reduce emissions by less than 10 %
- countries that need to reduce emissions by 10 % to 30 %
- countries that need to reduce emissions by 30 % to 50 %
- countries that need to reduce emissions by more than 50 %.

Looking at 2020, 2018 emission levels suggest that more than half of the countries are likely to attain the emission reduction commitments set for the period 2020-2029. This is supported by the results of an analysis of projected emissions reported by Member States in 2019 (European Commission, 2020). NH₃, NO_x and PM_{2.5} present major challenges.

16 countries

need to reduce NO_x emissions by more than 30 %.

5 countries

have to halve their PM_{2.5} emissions

However, the lockdowns implemented across Europe to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and the subsequent reduced economic activity in 2020 can be expected to affect emissions, in particular in the transport sector, with reduced emissions, especially of NO_x, expected.

- Cyprus, Germany, Lithuania, Poland and Romania need to deliver NO_x emission reductions of more than 10 % compared with 2018 levels. An additional seven countries need to reduce emissions by up to 10 %. Significant reductions in road transport in 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdowns may facilitate the attainment of these commitments for 2020.
- Six Member States (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Hungary and Romania) and the United Kingdom need to reduce PM_{2.5} emission levels by more than 10 % compared with 2018 levels. An additional four Member States need to reduce their emissions by up to 10 %. The impact of the

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lockdowns on PM_{2.5} emissions is difficult to predict at this stage, as the situation is still evolving.

- The principal source of NH₃ emissions is agriculture, a sector subject to far fewer COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Twelve Member States and the United Kingdom need to reduce NH₃ emissions by up to 10 % against 2018 levels to attain their emission reduction commitments. This is significant, as in many countries NH₃ emissions have decreased only slightly, or in some cases increased, since 2005. Denmark and Lithuania need to reduce emissions by more than 10 %.
- Seven Member States need to reduce their NMVOC emissions, while SO₂ emissions need to be reduced in three Member States.

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Table 2. Percentage emission reductions still required by EU Member States compared with 2018 emissions to meet 2020 and 2030 emission reduction commitments

Country Name	2020					2030				
	NH3	NMVOG	NOx	PM2.5	SO2	NH3	NMVOG	NOx	PM2.5	SO2
Austria	●	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	✓
Belgium	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	✓
Bulgaria	✓	●	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	✓
Croatia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Cyprus	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Czechia	✓	●	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Denmark	●	✓	●	●	✓	●	✓	●	●	●
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●
Finland	●	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	✓
France	●	✓	●	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Germany	●	✓	●	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	●
Greece	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	●	●	✓
Hungary	●	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	●	●	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	✓
Latvia	●	✓	●	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	✓
Lithuania	●	●	●	✓	●	●	●	●	✓	●
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	✓	✓
Malta	✓	●	●	✓	✓	✓	●	●	✓	✓
Netherlands	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	✓	✓
Poland	✓	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Romania	✓	✓	●	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Slovakia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	✓	●
Slovenia	✓	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Spain	●	✓	✓	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●
Sweden	●	✓	●	✓	✓	●	✓	●	✓	✓
United Kingdom	●	✓	●	●	✓	●	●	●	●	●

Current emission levels below the emission reduction commitment	✓
Emission reduction needed by less than 10 % from current levels	●
Emission reduction needed by 10 % to 30 % from current levels	●
Emission reduction needed by 30 % to 50 % from current levels	●
Emission reduction needed by more than 50 % from current levels	●

The effective implementation of the NEC Directive will be key to reaching the zero pollution goal of the new European Green Deal.

Looking ahead to delivering on the ambition of the European Green Deal

Effective implementation of the NEC Directive represents a milestone in the delivery of the Clean Air Package and is an essential component of the Zero Pollution Action Plan of the European Commission's European Green Deal (EU, 2019). It will be vital that EU Member States meet the emission reduction commitments set for 2020-2029 and for 2030 onwards.

Given current emission levels and an analysis of reported projected emissions, a steadfast approach to meeting targets is required. All Member States need to lower 2018 emission levels by more than 10 % for at least one pollutant. The greatest challenges relate to reducing emissions of NH₃, NO_x and PM_{2.5}.

- All Member States need to reduce NO_x emissions, with 16 of these requiring reductions of more than 30 %. Germany and Malta will need to halve emissions.
- Five Member States (Cyprus, Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Romania) will need to halve PM_{2.5} emissions, and an additional six Member States (Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) will need to reduce emissions by more than 30 %.
- Reducing NH₃ emissions will continue to be a major challenge. Half of the Member States will need to lower emissions by more than 10 % to reach their 2030 commitments. Strong action is required to reduce emissions from the agricultural sector.

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- Significant action will be needed to reduce SO₂ and NMVOC emissions in 15 Member States.

Effective and strong policies in the energy, transport and agriculture sectors are essential to ensure that 2030 targets are met.

The proposal for the first European Climate Law (EU, 2020) aims to achieve net zero GHG emissions for EU Member States, mainly by cutting GHG emissions, investing in green technologies and protecting the natural environment. This legislative package will also play a key role in establishing national policies and measures as announced by Member States in their National Air Pollution Control Programmes (NAPCPs). A review of NAPCPs carried out by the European Commission in 2019 (European Commission, 2020) indicated that many Member States are not on track to meet their 2030 emission reduction commitments. Ensuring consistency with National Energy and Climate Plans should result in an increased level of ambition in future revisions to NAPCPs. This requires a focus on delivering synergies in reducing both air pollutants and GHGs, especially across the energy (production and consumption), transport and agricultural sectors.

More information

Access the complete data set reported by Member States in the [EEA's online data viewer](#).

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In this briefing, the assessments of compliance against the NEC Directive 2010 emission ceilings or past emissions trends consider the Member States as the EU-28, because the data analysed are from the time when the United Kingdom was still an EU Member State; the assessments of effort towards future targets refer to the EU Member States and the United Kingdom separately, since they relate to the post-Brexit period.

Footnotes

1 Croatia joined the EU in mid-2013, so for the years 2010-2013, Croatia's emissions and ceilings are not considered.

2 Compliance rules relating to the reduction commitments are taken into account: emissions from sectors 3B (manure management) and 3D (agricultural soils) are not included in NO_x and NMVOC emissions; for those countries allowed to use "transport fuel used" emissions for compliance, these emissions have been taken into account. (This applies to Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. In accordance with its National Air Pollution Control Programme, Austria has decided to use emissions based on fuel sold for compliance checking against the emission reduction commitments; its emissions have been treated accordingly.) Adjustment applications have not been taken into account.

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