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Air pollution in Skopje: how citizens spurred policymakers towards the change

The air in Skopje, North Macedonia, is one of the most polluted in the world because of the city's natural position and people's reliance on fossil fuels. However, over recent years, many citizens have started demonstrating against this plague, pushing policymakers to follow their new will.



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North Macedonia is one of the countries most affected by air pollution in the world and the rate of premature deaths is higher than in most EU States. Every year 2,574 people die prematurely as a direct result of air pollution, reports BreatheLife, a joint campaign by the World Health Organization, UN Environment and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC).

Among the pollutants is the combustion particle PM_{2.5}. In Skopje, its concentration is 4.5 times higher than the WHO recommendations of below 10 micrograms of particles per cubic metre of air ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$). And in Tetovo it is even 8.1 times higher than the healthy threshold. Moreover, the current low temperatures are making the situation worse, because of the emissions resulting from the use of fossil fuels for heating buildings.

The mayor of Skopje, Petre Shilegov confirmed that around 60,000 households use low-quality wood and coal for heating, reported the local news agency Makfax. Citizens use even textiles, plastics and waste to heat their homes because of the lack of a reliable gas supply and the high cost of electricity.

The average low income (minimum salary is 260 euros), and energy poverty are just two of the issues making Skopje such a polluted city. Another reason is its natural position, as the capital of North Macedonia is located in a valley surrounded by mountains that trap the fog. The situation is further complicated by a temperature inversion, a natural phenomenon which causes warm air to remain above cool air and which contributes to the greenhouse effect.

Read full article here: <https://www.matchup-project.eu/news/air-pollution-in-skopje-how-citizens-spurred-policymakers-towards-the-change/> 

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