

12.10.2020

To: Desislava Bileva, Deputy Mayor of Environment of Sofia Municipality

Make healthy air the centre of your efforts to make Sofia a healthier environment for its citizens

Dear Desislava Bileva,

We would like to congratulate you on your new role as Deputy Mayor of Environment for Sofia and as fellow citizens, welcome you to this position. The health of citizens is closely linked to the environment and every move taken to protect and improve our natural environment is also of benefit to public health.

Association Air for Health is a organization with the specific goal of increasing awareness in Bulgaria around the topic of air pollution, and more specifically engage the medical community as an ambassador for this communication. We'd herewith like to offer you our support and collaboration in implementing measures that benefit air quality in Sofia.

We welcome the measures that the Sofia administration has already put in place for cleaner air, but the challenge of poor air quality remains.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Sofia is the European capital with the highest levels of fine dust particles (PM) in the air. Studies show that nitrogen levels are alarmingly high year-round. The situation is particularly worrying during the winter months, when the maximum allowable European standard of PM is exceeded up to 10 times, and world experts define the air in our city as harmful to health. As a result of the highly polluted air, between 800 and 900 people die in Sofia every year. In 2019, with the support of our European partners Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), we studied the air in six metropolitan schools located in different urban areas. The study showed the presence of nitrogen dioxide in the classrooms (due to heavy traffic) as well as elevated concentrations of fine dust particles. Another of our studies, in collaboration with the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University, examined morbidity in days with dirtier air. The results showed that the number of people seeking emergency medical care for heart attacks, strokes and other heart rhythms increased on days with more PM. The signals to the Center for Emergency Medical Aid also increase by an

average of 10% on the days when the average daily norm of the content of fine dust particles is increased.

You are coming to this position at a time of great challenge but that also holds great opportunity. COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of our health, our healthcare systems and our societies, and the need to ensure greater resilience. Urgent action to reduce environmental pollution is needed more than ever, and needs to be central to Europe's and national governments' recovery plans and investments. Eventually, any activity will reach city-level, and we hope that with your appointment, Sofia's citizens have someone that will make sure their health and the health of future generations is prioritised.

Every city has a role to play to ensure the shift from a polluting to a green economy with guaranteed health benefits for people including longer lives, less asthma attacks, stroke and cancer.

For Sofia, we encourage you to lead on the following measures in the frame of global campaign Healthy city of tomorrow:

- Urban planning and design that offers car-free mobility for work and leisure, car free city centres with green spaces and mostly pedestrianised areas
- Focus on electric public transport
- Expansion of safe cycling lanes in and around the city centre including bicycle highways
- Expansion of green and wild areas such as parks, community gardens or facade planting

The Healthy city of tomorrow campaign was supported by Veloevolutsia, Save Sofia, Gorichka, National patient organization.

Air For Health and its members are ready to work with you in this transformational time and are available for a meeting.

Sincerely,

Association Air4Health

