Health Risk Assessment of Air Pollution and the Impact of the New WHO Guidelines

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Contents

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Summary

Air pollution is a major cause of premature death and disease and is the single largest environmental health risk in Europe. Heart disease and stroke are the most common reasons for premature deaths attributable to air pollution, followed by lung diseases and lung cancer.

The health risk assessment methodology assumptions have been recently adapted to follow the recommendations by the World Health Organisation (WHO), released in 2021. The new global air quality guidelines by WHO provide up-to-date health-based guideline levels for major health-damaging air pollutants and new recommendations for assessing the risk of exposure to air pollution.

This report estimates the health risk related to air pollution in 2020 based on the latest methodology. The estimates consider the number of premature deaths and years of life lost related to exposure to fine particulate matter, ozone and nitrogen dioxide, both for the 27 Member States of the European Union and for additional 14 European countries (Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, and Türkiye).

A sensitivity analysis to the changes in concentration-response functions and counterfactual concentrations is performed to understand the impact of such changes on the mortality outcome estimates. The sensitivity analysis included both old and new health risk methodology assumptions but also the recommendation from the ELAPSE study on the concentration response functions. The ELAPSE project includes some of the most recent studies on the health effects at low air pollution levels by examining associations between exposures to relatively low levels of air pollution across Europe, including levels below the current EU standards.

The results for 2020 show that the largest health risks are estimated for the countries with the largest populations. However, in relative terms, when considering e.g., years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants, the largest relative risks are observed in central and eastern European countries for $PM_{2.5}$, in central and southern European countries for $NO₂$, and south and eastern European for $O₃$. The lowest impact is found for the northern and north-western parts of Europe, where the concentrations are lowest. The number of premature deaths attributed to air pollution in 2020 compared to 2019, increased for PM_{2.5} and decreased for $NO₂$ and $O₃$. Apart from the changes in concentrations and demographics, the COVID-19 pandemics seems to also have an influence on these changes. For $PM_{2.5}$, the reduction in concentrations were counteracted by the excess of deaths due to the pandemics. In the case of $NO₂$, the reduction in concentrations was more pronounced as a result of the lockdown measures and the drastic reduction in traffic and its impact in reducing mortality was bigger than the increasing impact of excess of deaths due to COVID-19.

Changing assumptions on concentration-response functions and counterfactual concentrations have implications for estimating mortality health outcomes. The sensitivity analysis shows that it is not straightforward to assess which assumptions estimates the highest health impacts when both factors change. In this case, the final outcome will depend on the concentration at the grid-cell level. The latest assumptions are expected to reduce the health outcomes for PM_{2.5} and increase for NO₂ and O₃, when compared to the previous one. When aggregated to all countries, the health outcomes are reduced by over 40 % for PM_{2.5} and increased by 50 % and 30 % for NO₂ and O₃, respectively, in 2020. However, this change varies across countries depending on the concentration level the population in the individual countries is exposed to.

1 Introduction

The health risk assessments (HRAs) produced by the European Environment Agency (EEA) and the European Topic Centre (ETC) on Human Health and the Environment (HE, and its predecessors) on the risk of premature mortality due to exposure to outdoor air pollution offer an objective and comparable estimate of the impacts of air pollution since 2014. The estimations differentiate the individual impacts of fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), ozone (O₃), and ambient concentration levels country-wise and at the European level, without focusing on any specific source. By identifying changes over time, the reports provide input to the development and implementation of measures to improve air quality in Europe and serve as means to communicate the impact of exposure to ambient air pollution on the population's health.

The EEA/ETC HRA focus has been on mortality-based indicators. The preference is mostly related to the better availability and quality of mortality data from death registries. It also captures an important share of the burden of disease resulting from exposure to the three main air pollutants of concern in Europe. The estimates are based on "all-cause natural mortality", which comprises all causes of death except the category of external causes of death, such as accidents, violence or self-harm. The assessments have been based on the recommendations in the HRAPIE report (WHO, 2013) to estimate the risk of exposure to pollution in Europe. However, the methodology has been recently adapted to follow the new Air Quality Guidelines (AQG) recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021). The new AQG provide up-to-date health-based guideline levels for major health-damaging air pollutants and new recommendations of the shape of the concentration–response function (CRF) in relation to critical health outcomes for relevant averaging times.

However, studies increasingly show that ambient air pollution is not only associated with mortality but also with morbidity due to several chronic conditions inflicted by air pollution exposure. For instance, the results of the Global Burden of Disease (GBD, 2020) study clearly indicate that, for certain outcomes, the share of morbidity is not negligible. Even for diseases with high mortality burden, such as lung cancer, ischemic heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the share of morbidity in Western Europe is 1.4, 5, and 36 %, respectively (IHME, 2022). This is strongly related to the increasing trend of non-communicable disease burden in countries with high socio-economic status.

It would be advantageous to assess health risk based on both mortality and morbidity indicators. ETC and EEA have started calculating the morbidity due to exposure to the same air pollutants and the results will be shown in the Eionet report ETC HE 2022/11 (ETC HE, 2022a). Combining both mortality and morbidity indicators captures a more comprehensive impact of diseases, injuries, and risk factors on population health; even if combining both health outcomes can be very demanding data-wise (Pifarré i Arolas et al., 2021; Plass et al., 2013).

This report presents the health risk assessment to estimate the mortality risk of exposure to $PM_{2.5}$, $NO₂$, and O₃ ambient concentration levels across 41 countries in Europe in 2020. This assessment estimates the risk based on the latest WHO CRF recommendations (WHO, 2021). To assess how much the current estimation differs from the ones presented in past HRAs, e.g., ETC/ATNI (2021), a set of calculations were undertaken to assess the sensitivity of health outcomes to changes in the baseline assumption. The report presents a recap of the HRA's methodology and describes different scenarios used in the sensitivity analysis in Section 2; Section 3 presents the results considering 2020 concentration levels across Europe, based on the latest WHO recommendations. Section 4 presents the sensitivity analysis of the mortality outcomes based on different recommendations. Section 5 discusses the possibility of combining the EEA/ETC HRA mortality indicators with the morbidity indicators presented in the Eionet report ETC HE 2022/11, and the conclusions are laid down in Section 6.

2 Estimation of the mortality outcomes

A HRA assesses a specific health outcome or a set of health outcomes in a given population. In the present HRA, the risk of mortality in a population due to exposure to air pollution is represented by the concentration-response function (CRF), which is based on Relative Risks (RR) estimates derived from epidemiological studies. Mortality due to air pollution can be quantified by combining pollutant dependent CRF with ambient air quality data (1*1 km² gridded data), population density data (1*1 km² gridded data), and the baseline frequency of the health outcome (demographic data per country, age, and sex). The mortality outcomes are estimated per grid cell, then aggregated to country-level and larger areas (e.g., EU27). ETC/ATNI (2019) and references therein thoroughly describe the steps to estimate the mortalityrelated outcomes. The report also covers the data requirements and data pre-processing. A short recap of the methodology and data used, including data gap-filling, is found in Annex 1.

In the EEA/ETC assessments, the health impact attributable to exposure to PM_{2.5}, NO₂, and O₃ in 41 European countries (the 27 EU members (EU27), Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, San Marino, Serbia, Switzerland, and Türkiye) and is quantified in terms of two mortality outcomes:

- Number of premature deaths (PD): deaths that occur before a person reaches an expected age. This expected age is the remaining life expectancy at the age of death, stratified by sex and age. Premature deaths are considered preventable if their causes can be eliminated. The baseline incidence to estimate the attributed premature deaths is the crude death rates at the national level.
- Years of life lost (YLL): the years of life lost due to premature deaths. It estimates the average number of years people would have lived if they had not died prematurely. The crude death rates and life expectancy at the national level are the baseline indicators to estimate YLL. The YLL per 100 000 inhabitants is also used in this report as an indicator to be comparable across countries.

The baseline incidence considers only natural deaths for ages above 30 years old for $PM_{2.5}$ and $NO₂$, and all ages for O_3 . The age groups differ to represent the same ages included in the respective epidiemological studies the CFRs are based on.

The estimation targets the long-term effect of $PM_{2.5}$ and NO_2 exposure, based on annual means, and the acute effect of O_3 , based on the annual sum of daily maximum running 8-h average concentrations above 35 ppb (SOMO35) divided by the number of days in a year.

Up to 2021, the estimation of mortality outcomes was based on the CRF recommendations in the HRAPIE project report (WHO, 2013). From 2022, the EEA/ETC will consider the latest WHO global AQG (WHO, 2021) instead. The latest WHO global guidelines are based on a review of the latest available epidemiological studies documenting the adverse health effects of exposure to air pollution. The descriptions of the CRFs and counterfactual concentrations are presented i[n Table 2.1.](#page-7-0) Note that, as in the previous 2013 report, the WHO still recommends assuming a linear increase in the risk of mortality of x % for a y μ g/m³ increase in concentration. For instance, the mortality risk due to PM_{2.5} exposure increases by 8 % for a 10 μ g/m³ increase in PM_{2.5} annual mean concentrations when considering WHO AQG.

Additionally, to the updated WHO Global AQG, the CRFs determined by the ELAPSE project (Brunekreft et al., 2021) were also considered. This project includes some of the most recent studies on the health effects at low air pollution levels by examining associations between exposures to relatively low levels of air pollution across Europe, including levels below the current EU standards. The findings of the project were not included in the WHO review. It focuses on several pollutants – PM_{2.5} (including particle composition), black carbon, $NO₂$, and $O₃$ – and how the exposure to these pollutants relates to all-cause and causespecific mortality and morbidity endpoints. For all-cause mortality, the ELAPSE study reports CRFs only for PM_{2.5} and NO₂ since there is still a lack of new studies proving the relation between long-term exposure to O³ and mortality in Europe.

[Table 2.1](#page-7-0) describes the CRFs recommended by WHO (2013, 2021) and ELAPSE. Note that all CRFs reflect long-term exposure to the pollutant, except for O_3 that describes the acute exposure (short-term) to O_3 .

Table 2.1: Concentration-response functions (as RR) linking exposure to PM2.5, NO2, and O³ and mortality, and their associated 95 % confidence interval (CI)

We have also introduced changes in the counterfactual concentration assumed for the estimations. The counterfactual concentration is a reference exposure level against which the health impacts are calculated (C₀ in Eq. A.1, Annex 1). Currently, the EEA/ETC HRAs aligns the counterfactual concentration with the AQG levels defined by WHO (2021) for PM_{2.5} and NO₂. The counterfactual concentration for O₂ is still based on 35 ppb (SOMO35). Changing counterfactual concentrations will also impact the final outcome. The rationale for the counterfactual concentrations stated in [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) is described below.

Estimates based on different combinations of CRFs and counterfactual concentrations were compared to assess the sensitivity of the mortality-related health outcomes to any of these parameters, or both[. Table](#page-7-1) [2.2](#page-7-1) describes the CRF and counterfactual combinations used for the sensitivity analysis. The baseline scenarios are the scenarios with the assumptions that have been considered for previous (WHO2013, up to 2021) and current (WHO2021, this report) assumptions for HRA estimations. For ELAPSE we assume that the scenarios follow the same counterfactual concentration assumptions as the scenarios based on the WHO (2021) CRFs.

Table 2.2: Description of the concentration-response function (RR – see Table 2.1) and **counterfactual concentration combination used for the sensitivity analysis**

For PM2.5, the HRAPIE report (WHO, 2013) indicates that the quantification of long-term impacts "should be calculated at all levels of PM2.5". That is why EEA has considered a counterfactual concentration of 0 μ g/m³ in the past (until 2021), even if some scientists interpreted the text in WHO (2013) as "all anthropogenic levels of PM2.5". The Global updates of the WHO AQG (WHO, 2021) refer to the new AQG

level of 5 μ g/m³ as the lowest concentration level from which a "minimal relevant amount" of a health outcome will result from long-term exposure. Thisthreshold is so because the data supporting the analysis do not provide evidence of the risk function assuming a linear shape below 5 μg/m³. Therefore, it has been decided to take 5 μ g/m³ as the counterfactual concentration for the new baseline scenario while maintaining 0 µg/m³ for sensitivity analyses since there is no evidence of a minimum concentration below which no effect is expected. A third value for the counterfactual concentration (2.5 μ g/m³) was considered in prior assessments in the sensitivity analysis, e.g., ETC/ATNI (2021), because 2.5 μ g/m³ is the lowest average background concentration level in Europe (ETC/ACM, 2017) and the minimum observed exposure concentration in several epidemiolocal studies (Brauer et al., 2022;WHO, 2021). The analyses for PM_{2.5} in this report will consider the three counterfactual concentrations: 5, 2.5 and 0 μ g/m³. For NO₂, the HRAPIE report (WHO, 2013) recommends quantifying the long-term exposure effects from 20 μg/m³. Soon after the HRAPIE report was released, new epidemiological studies claimed that this threshold was considered too high, which is why EEA has also been using, for the past sensitivity analyses, a counterfactual concentration of 10 μ g/m³. The concentration level of 10 μ g/m³ is now the AQG level for NO₂ in WHO (2021). Additionally, all concentration levels were considered to be harmful to human health to be consistent with the assumptions for PM2.5. Therefore, three counterfactual concentrations were analysed in this report: 20, 10, and 0 μ g/m³.

For O_3 , we have decided to keep the counterfactual concentration of 70 μ g/m³, equivalent to SOMO35, and keep SOMO10 as a sensitivity threshold, as recommended in HRAPIE (WHO, 2013).

Note that quantifications of health impacts are done individually for these air pollutants, and they cannot be added together, as they exhibit some degree of correlation — positive or negative. For example, HRAPIE (WHO, 2013) suggested that adding the results for $PM_{2.5}$ and $NO₂$ may lead to double counting of the effects (up to 30 %).

3 Mortality due to air pollution levels in Europe in 2020

The population mortality related to exposure to $PM_{2.5}$, NO₂, and O₃ concentration levels in 2020 in Europe based on the CRFs recommended by the WHO AQG in 2021 (see [Table 2.1\)](#page-7-0) and the counterfactual concentrations are 5 μ g/m³, 10 μ g/m³ and 35 ppb for PM_{2.5}, NO₂ and O₃, respectively. The estimations are presented for individual countries and aggregated areas (EU27, EEA32 and all countries). Map 3.1, Map 3.2, and Map 3.3 show the population-weighted mean concentration, the estimated number of attributable premature deaths, and the YLL per 100 000 inhabitants distribution across Europe for PM_{2.5}, $NO₂$, and $O₃$, respectively. Table 3.1 shows the total population, the population-weighted mean concentrations, and the estimated number of attributable premature deaths; Table 3.2 shows the YLL and the YLL per 100 000 inhabitants.

The exposure to concentration levels in 2020 resulted in 275 000 premature deaths related to PM_{2.5} exposure, 64 000 to $NO₂$, and 28 000 to $O₃$ across the 41 countries included in the assessment (40 in case of PM2.5, since Türkiye is not included in the interpolated map used for the calculation due to a lack of enough number of background stations). For EU27, the number of premature deaths is 238 000, 49 000, and 24 000, respectively. When considering both the life expectancy and the dying age, the estimate points to 2 773 000 (583) YLL (YLL/100 000 inhabitants) due to exposure to PM_{2.5}, 680 000 (122) due to exposure to NO₂, and 306 000 (55) due to exposure to O₃. For the EU27, YLL (YLL/100 000 inhabitants) are 2 410 000 (544), 484 000 (109), 249 000 (56), respectively.

The results show that the largest absolute health impacts in terms of premature deaths and YLL attributable to air pollution are estimated for the countries with some of the largest populations. However, in relative terms, i.e., when considering YLL per 100 000 inhabitants, the outcome can be quite different and follow the population-weighted mean concentrations more closely. This difference is clearly seen in Map 3.1, Map 3.2, and Map 3.3.

For PM2.5, the largest absolute health impacts are estimated for, in order of decreasing rank, Italy, Poland, Germany, Romania, and Spain. When considering YLL per 100 000 inhabitants, the largest relative impacts are observed in central and eastern European countries where the highest concentrations of PM_{2.5} are also observed, namely, in order of decreasing rank, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bulgaria. The smallest relative impacts are found in countries situated in the north and north-west of Europe, namely, in order of increasing rank, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Estonia.

The largest absolute impacts from exposure to NO₂ are seen, in order of decreasing rank, in Türkiye, Italy, Germany, Spain, and France. When considering YLL per 100 000 inhabitants, the highest rates are found in, in order of decreasing rank, Bulgaria, Türkiye, Romania, Greece, and Serbia. The smallest relative impacts are found in Estonia, Iceland, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, with barely any impact.

Regarding O_3 , the countries with the largest absolute impacts are, in order of decreasing rank, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and Türkiye. The countries with the highest rates of YLL per 100 000 inhabitants are, in order of decreasing rank, Albania, Montenegro, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia. The countries with the smallest relative impacts are Iceland, Finland, Ireland, Norway, and Sweden in order of increasing rank.

Map 3.1: PM2.5 population-weighted mean concentration (popAvgCnc, µg/m³) (a), number of premature deaths (PD) (b) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (YLLper100k) (c), , due to exposure to PM2.5 concentration levels in 2020 across Europe

Map 3.2: NO2 population-weighted mean concentration (µg/m³) (a), number of premature deaths (b) and years of life lost (c), per 100 000 inhabitants, due to exposure to NO² concentration levels in 2020 across Europe

Map 3.3: O³ population-weighted mean concentration (PopAvgCNC, µg/m³ .days) (a), number of premature deaths (PD) (b) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (YLLper100k) (c),, due to exposure to O³ concentration levels in 2020 across Europe

Table 3.1: Premature deaths (PD) attributable to PM2.5, NO² , and O³ exposure in 41 European countries and the EU27 in 2020

Notes:

The annual mean (in μ g/m³) and the SOMO35 (in μ g/m³.days), expressed as population-weighted concentration, are obtained according to the methodology described by ETC HE (2022b) and references herein and not only from monitoring stations.

Rounding: population for every country and every aggregation is rounded to the nearest thousand; PDs are rounded, for every country, to the nearest hundred if the number is above 1,000 and to the nearest ten if the number is below 1,000; PDs are rounded (once the unrounded national totals have been added) to the nearest thousand for EU27, EEA32 and all countries.

Table 3.2: Years of life lost (YLL) attributable to PM2.5, NO² and O³ exposure in 41 European countries (individual and total) and the EU27 in 2020

Notes:

Rounding: YLLs are rounded, for every country, to the nearest hundred if the number is above 1,000 and to the nearest ten if the number is below 1,000; YLLs are rounded (once the unrounded national totals have been added) to the nearest thousand for EU27, EEA32 and all countries; YLL/100,000 inhabitants are calculated from the unrounded YLL and total population and are not rounded.

The health outcome for years before 2020 was estimated based on the updated WHO Global AQG to compare 2020 results with the risk associated with concentration levels in previous years. Figure 3.1 shows the estimation of the premature deaths related to the pollution of $PM_{2.5}$, NO₂, and O₃, respectively, between 2005 and 2020 for two aggregated areas: EU27 and all countries except Türkiye. Türkiye's $NO₂$ and $O₃$ data was excluded in this analysis for consistency across the years as data for Türkiye are only available from 2016 due to the lack of sufficient monitoring data for the interpolated concentration maps (ETC HE, 2022b). Figure 3.1 also includes the population-weighted average concentration (secondary vertical axis) to describe the average concentration levels the European population has been exposed to since 2005. The data supporting Figure 3.1 is available in Table A3.1, in Annex 3. The YLL has the same development as the number of premature deaths and is, therefore, not shown here.

The mortality associated with $PM_{2.5}$ and $NO₂$ concentration levels has decreased in both areas since 2005 (over 40 %). When comparing 2020 and 2019, the estimations on the number of premature deaths show a slight increase in 2020, 3 % for EU27 and 5 % for all countries (ex. Türkiye) for PM_{2.5}, and a sharp decrease for NO₂, 29 % and 24 %, respectively. Though the population-weighted concentration for PM_{2.5} has not increased, the mortality related to its exposure has increased. The population-weighted concentration for PM_{2.5} was reduced by 6 % for both EU27 and all countries (ex. Türkiye) and 18 and 14 % for NO₂, respectively. The increase in the risk related to PM_{2.5} in 2020 reflects an increase in mortality due to COVID-19. The European region registered over 1.3 million excess deaths associated with the pandemic in 2020 (WHO, 2022), and these deaths are included in all natural causes in the mortality rates. On the other hand, for NO₂, the mortality rate increase did not have the same impact since the population-weighted concentration has decreased substantially due to lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 (EEA, 2020; Solberg et al., 2021).

The $O₃$ concentration is strongly dependent on meteorology and precursor emissions. This dependency reflects the variability of the mortality associated with exposure to $O₃$ concentration levels over the years, with the increase typically correlating with sunny and dry summers. After the 2018 peak, the concentrations have been decreasing. However, the number of premature deaths is higher in 2020. Like PM_{2.5}, this increase is related to the increase in mortality rates.

Figure 3.1 Development of the number of premature deaths (vertical-left axis) due to exposure to PM2.5, NO2, and O³ concentration levels (vertical-right axis) from 2005 to 2020 for EU27 and all countries (except Türkiye)

Table 3.3: The range of variability in the number of premature deaths (PD) and years of life lost (YLL) attributable to PM2.5, NO2, and O³ exposure in the EU27 and 41 (40, in the case of PM2.5) European countries (All countries) in 2020

Other uncertainties and caveats related to the input data and methodology are described in Annex 1.

4 Sensitivity analysis of the estimation of mortality health outcomes

This section aims to indicate how sensitive the estimation of health outcomes is to changes in the CRFs, the counterfactual concentrations, or both and to indicate the change in EEA 's estimations between the HRA's new and old assumptions on CRFs and counterfactual concentrations. Figure A2.1, Figure A2.2, and Figure A2.3 in Annex 2 describe the risk and its behaviour based on the choice of CRF and counterfactual concentration for PM_{2.5}, NO₂, and O₃, respectively. The CRF defines the slope of a log-linear function (Eq. A1.1, Annex 1), and the counterfactual concentration defines the lowest concentration level a population is exposed to that is considered potentially harmful in the estimation (risk of mortality $= 1$).

The general behaviour is the following:

- **Changing CRF and assuming the same counterfactual concentration** impacts linearly on the estimations: the highest estimation will be based on the highest CRF and the difference between estimations will be higher when the concentration levels are higher.
- **Assuming a constant CRF and varying the counterfactual concentration** implies that the highest counterfactual concentration will result in a lower estimation of mortality. The risk is the same, but a lower counterfactual level implies that the risk analysis considers a larger range of concentration levels.
- **Varying both CRF and counterfactual concentration** makes the estimates dependent on three variables: the CRF, counterfactual concentration, and the concentration at the grid-cell level. The latter becomes a key factor in determining which scenario results in higher estimation since the functions tend to intersect at some point.

Note that the grid cells with concentration below the counterfactual level are not included in the mortality estimation.

The analysis is presented in two ways: the development since 2005 to see how changes in concentration have impacted the health outcomes based on the different assumptions and comparing the three baseline scenarios for 2020.

4.1 PM2.5

Figure 4.1 (left panels) shows the estimates of the number of premature deaths for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Bulgaria, based on the scenarios described in [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for PM_{2.5}. The results for two individual countries show the contrast between choosing a country with low (Finland) and mid-high (Bulgaria) concentration levels. Figure 4.1 (right panels) shows the comparison between specific scenarios and the adopted baseline scenario (WHO2021), relative to WHO2021: WHO2013_sens2 and ELAPSE to check the sensitivity to the CRF, WHO2021_sens1, WHO2021_sens2 to check the sensitivity to the counterfactual concentration, and WHO2013 to check the differences between the previous assumptions and the current ones. The data supporting these Figures is available in [Table A3.1](#page-45-1) and Table A3.2 in Annex 3.

Figure 4.1: Development of premature deaths due to exposure to PM2.5 concentration levels (verticalleft axis) from 2005 to 2020 for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Bulgaria considering the baseline (highlighted) and sensitivity scenarios (left panel). The relative difference (vertical-left axis) between the WHO2021 baseline scenario and selected scenarios and the population-weighted mean concentration (vertical-right axis) across the same period (right panel). Se[e Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the scenario description

As expected, Figure 4.1 (left panels) shows that for scenarios assuming the same CRF, the number of premature deaths will be higher for estimations with the lowest counterfactual concentration. Therefore, all estimations considering all concentration levels (C_0 = 0 μ g/m³) have the highest outcome and considering counterfactual concentration level of 5 μ g/m³ results in the lowest estimates. On the other hand, when assuming the same counterfactual concentration, the estimations with the highest CRF will result in the highest number of premature deaths. Therefore, all the scenarios assuming the ELAPSE (2022) CRFs have the highest outcome and the scenarios assuming the WHO (2013) CRFs have the lowest (if crosscompared with scenarios with the same counterfactual concentration). This behaviour is seen by the constant relative difference between scenarios with the same counterfactual concentration and varying relative difference for scenarios with the same CRF (Figure 4.1, right panels). The relative difference between scenarios with the same CRF depends of the level of concentrations at the grid-cells. The relative difference is increasing as the concentrations are decreasing across the years and getting closer to the counterfactual level assumed in the WHO2021 (a smaller population is impacted if concentration levels are close to or below the counterfactual concentration).

As mentioned in the introduction of this Section, when varying both CRF and counterfactual concentration it is not straightforward to say which assumption (scenario) will produce the highest number of premature deaths. The outcome depends on the concentration level the population is exposed to. For example, when the population is exposed to concentrations much higher than the counterfactual level (e.g., Bulgaria), clustering between scenarios assuming the same CRF is clear. Suppose the difference between the concentration the population is exposed to and the counterfactual concentration is small (low impact), or the concentration is lower than the counterfactual concentration (no impact) (e.g., Finland), the clustering is between scenarios with the same counterfactual concentration. For averaged concentrations across the 40 countries, the scenario analysis showsthe scenarios combining ELAPSE (2022) CRFs with counterfactual concentration of 0 (ELAPSE_sens2) and 2.5 μ g/m³ (ELAPSE_sens1) resulting in the highest outcome, and WHO2013 CRFs with counterfactual concentration of 5 μ g/m³ (WHO2013_sens2) with the lowest. The remaining scenarios cluster in pairs, where one scenario has an higher CRF but lower counterfactual concentration and the other the opposite: (1) ELAPSE CRF and $C_0 = 5$ (ELAPSE) clusters with WHO2021 CRF and C_0 =0 μ g/m³ (WHO2021_sens2); (2) WHO2021 CRF and C_0 =2.5 (WHO2021_sens1) clusters with WHO2013 CRF and $C_0 = 0$ μ g/m³ (WHO2013); and (3) WHO2021 CRF and $C_0 = 5$ clusters with WHO2013 CRF and C_0 =2.5 μ g/m³ (WHO2013_sens1). Within these clusters, the scenarios with the highest CRF are typically showing higher outcomes. However, with the decrease of concentration levels the population is exposed to since 2005, this may change, e.g., 2012 for cluster (1) for all countries where the counterfactual concentration level becomes the constraining factor. For more details on the behaviour of the risk functions the reader is referred to Annex 2.

Thus, when comparing the three baseline scenarios assuming the average concentrations across the 40 countries, ELAPSE baseline scenario will result in the highest estimates and the new WHO2021 baseline scenario the lowest. For countries with concentrations typically closer to levels in Bulgaria (i.e., 3 to 4 times higher the counterfactual level of 5 μ g/m³), ELAPSE baseline scenario will result in the highest estimates and both old and new assumptions (WHO2013 and WHO2021 baseline scenario, respectively) will result in similar estimates. For countries with concentrations typically closer to levels in Finland (close to the counterfactual level or lower), the old assumptions (WHO2013) will result in higher estimations, followed by ELAPSE and WHO2021 (new assumptions).

The mortality risk for a population exposed to PM_{2.5} based on the current HRA methodology (WHO2021 baseline scenario) is typically lower than the previous one (WHO2013 baseline scenario). The mortality risk associated with exposure to $PM_{2.5}$ concentration is higher in the current methodology. However, assuming the counterfactual concentration at the same level as the WHO AQG level (5 μ g/m³) instead of 0 μ g/m³ implies that areas with populations exposed to very low concentrations (those below 5 μ g/m³) are not considered to be at risk: 2.5 % of the population in Europe, in 2020, was exposed to PM_{2.5} concentration of 5 μ g/m³ and below, 1.1 % in 2005 (ETC HE (2022a), Figure A1.1. Annex 1). Only at levels above 22 μ g/m³ do the estimations based on WHO2021 surpass WHO2013 (97 % of the population considered in the analysis is exposed to concentrations of 22 μ g/m³ or below in 2020).

Other considerations are:

- sharper reduction in the number of premature deaths since 2005 when considering the ELAPSE's CRF recommendations, followed by WHO (2021) and least pronounced for scenarios considering WHO (2013)'s CRF recommendations (see Figure A2.1 in Annex 2). This will impact the estimations on reaching the Zero Pollution Action Plan (ZPAP) target set by the European Commission. The ZPAP sets the goal of reducing the number of premature deaths caused by PM_{2.5} in 2030 by at least 55 % compared with 2005 levels.
- the scenario closer to the baseline scenario simulating the old HRA assumptions (WHO2013) is WHO2021 sens1 ($C₀=2.5$) scenario.

The following Figures indicate how the mortality outcomes due to $PM_{2.5}$ levels in Europe in 2020 change across the countries depending on the baseline assumptions. Figure 4.2 shows the number of premature deaths and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants estimated based on the assumptions of the three baseline scenarios. The data supporting these Figures are available in Table A3.7 in Annex 3.

As expected from the analysis above, the estimation based on the WHO2021 baseline scenario translates into the lowest health outcome country-wise, except for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, the difference between the estimations varies depending on the level of concentrations in the individual countries.

Figure 4.2: Number of premature deaths (top) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (per 100k inh) (bottom) due to exposure to PM2.5 concentration levels in 2020 for individual countries based on the baseline estimations (se[e Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the scenario description)

Notes: please be aware of the different units in the Y-axes.

4.2 NO²

[Figure 4.3](#page-25-0) (left panels) shows the estimates for the number of premature deaths for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Italy, based on the scenarios described in [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for $NO₂$ The results for two individual countries show the contrast between choosing a country with low (Finland) and mid-high (Italy) concentration levels. [Figure 4.3](#page-25-0) (right panels) shows the comparison between specific scenarios and the adopted baseline scenario (WHO2021), relative to WHO2021: WHO2013_sens1 and ELAPSE to check the sensitivity to the CRF, WHO2021_sens1, WHO2021_sens2 to check the sensitivity to the counterfactual concentration, and WHO2013 to check the differences between the previous assumptions and the current ones. The data supporting these Figures are available in Table A3.3 and Table A3.4 in Annex 3.

Figure 4.3 Development of premature deaths due to exposure to NO² concentration levels (verticalleft axis) from 2005 to 2020 for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Italy considering the baseline (highlighted) and sensitivity scenarios (left panel). The relative difference (vertical-left axis) between the WHO2021 baseline scenario and selected scenarios and the population-weighted mean concentration (vertical-right axis) across the same period (right panel). See [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the scenario description

As expected, [Figure 4.3](#page-25-0) (left panels) show that for scenarios assuming the same CRF, the number of premature deaths will be higher for estimations assuming the lowest counterfactual concentration. Therefore, all scenarios considering all concentration levels (C₀= 0 μ g/m³) have the highest outcome and those considering counterfactual concentration level of 20 µg/m³ result on the lowest estimates (if crosscompared with scenarios with the same CRF). On the other hand, when assuming the same counterfactual concentration, the scenarios with the highest CRF will result in higher number of premature deaths. This is why all the scenarios assuming WHO (2013)'s CRF have the highest outcome and the scenarios assuming WHO (2021)'s CRF have the lowest (if cross-compared with scenarios with the same counterfactual concentration). On the right panels, these behaviours are seen by the constant relative difference between scenarios with the same counterfactual concentration and varying relative difference for scenarios with the same CRF. The latter depends on the level of concentrations the population is exposed to. In the case of NO₂, the scenario benchmarked (WHO2021) has the counterfactual value of 10 μ g/m³. When compared with the scenario with the same CRF but higher counterfactual concentration (WHO2021_sens1), the difference increases (negative) with the decreasing concentrations because more concentration levels are included in the mortality risk estimations with the WHO2021. On the contrary, there is an increase on the relative difference (positive), when compared with the scenario with the same CRF but lower counterfactual concentration (WHO2021_sens2), as less levels of concentration are included in the estimation of WHO2021 and the concentrations are decreasing, on average.

For NO₂, when assessing the results across the scenarios (varying both CRF and counterfactual concentrations), the highest estimates are for WHO2013_sens2 and ELAPSE_sen2, the scenarios assuming the highest CRFs and the lowest counterfactual concentration (C_0 = 0 μ g/m³). The lowest estimate is for WHO2021_sens1, with the lowest CRF and the highest counterfactual concentration (C₀= 20 μ g/m³). If we compare average (All countries) and mid-high (Italy) concentration levels, the results are very similar, especially for the last decade. Two cluster of scenarios emerge (apart from the two scenarios with the highest estimates): one comprised of WHO2021 baseline, ELAPSE baseline, and WHO2021_sens2 and the other of the three scenarios with counterfactual concentration of 20 μ g/m³, and the remaining one with 10 μ g/m³, WHO2021 baseline. Within these clusters, the scenarios with the highest CRF are typically showing higher outcomes. However, with the decreasing of the concentration level the population is exposed to since 2005, this may change, e.g., in 2019 for the first cluster. If the population is exposed to concentration levels close to or below the counterfactual level, like in Finland, the WHO2021_sens2 (C₀= 0 μ g/m³) is singled out as the 3rd highest estimate. This is because all levels are considered when estimating the mortality risk. For the remaining scenarios, the two clusters are based on the counterfactual concentrations (10 vs 20 μ g/m³) since most of the population in Finland is expose to levels below these two counterfactual levels. When comparing the three baseline scenarios only, ELAPSE baseline scenario

will result in the highest estimates. For more details on the behaviour of the risk functions the reader is referred to Annex 2.

The relative risk for a population exposed to $NO₂$ based on the current HRA methodology (WHO2021 baseline scenario) is lower than the previous one (WHO2013 baseline scenario). However, assuming the counterfactual concentration at the same level as the WHO AQG level (10 μ g/m³) instead of at 20 μ g/m³ implies that more population is considered to be at risk. In 2020, the percentage of the European population exposed to levels of 10 μ g/m³ and below was 27.2 % (6.4 % in 2005). 78.6 % (39.8 % in 2005) was exposed to concentrations levels of 20 µg/m³ and below (ETC HE (2022a), Figure A2.2 in Annex 2).

Other considerations are:

- sharper reduction in the number of premature deaths since 2005 when considering the scenarios based on the WHO (2013) and ELAPSE (2021) CRF recommendations, and least pronounced for scenarios considering WHO (2021) CRF recommendations (see Figure A2.1 in Annex 2).
- the scenario closer to the baseline scenario simulating the old HRA assumptions (WHO2013) is WHO2021 ($C₀=10$) scenario.

The following Figures indicate how the mortality outcomes due to $NO₂$ levels in Europe in 2020 change across the countries depending on the baseline assumptions. [Figure 4.4](#page-27-0) shows the number of premature deaths and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants estimated based on the assumptions of the three baseline scenarios. The data supporting these Figures are available in Table A3.3 in Annex 2.

Figure 4.4: Number of premature deaths (top) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (per 100k inh) (bottom) due to exposure to NO² concentration levels in 2020 for individual countries on the baseline estimations (see [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the scenario description)

Notes: please be aware of the different units on the Y-axes.

As expected from the analysis above, all the countries have the highest numbers with the estimation based on the ELAPSE scenario, followed by WHO2021. Only Türkiye shows estimates higher for WHO2013, since much of the population is exposed to levels above 20 μ g/m³. However, the difference between the estimations varies depending on the level of concentration the population in the individual countries is exposed to.

4.3 O³

Figure 4.5 (left panels) shows the estimates for the number of premature deaths for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Italy, based on the scenarios described in [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for O_3 The results for two individual countries show the contrast between choosing a country with low (Finland) and mid-high (Italy) concentration levels. Figure 4.5 (right panels) shows the comparison between the old baseline scenario (WHO2013) against the adopted baseline scenario (WHO2021). Note that SOMO10 is not available for the whole extent of the period analysed and, therefore, not included. The data supporting these Figures are available in Table A3.5 and Table A3.6 in Annex 3.

Figure 4.5: Development of premature deaths due to exposure to O³ concentration levels (vertical-left axis) from 2005 to 2020 for all countries (except Türkiye), Finland, and Italy considering the baseline (highlighted) scenarios (left panel). The relative difference (vertical-left axis) between the WHO2021 baseline scenario and WHO2013 baseline scenario and the population-weighted mean concentration (vertical-right axis) across the same period (right panel). See [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the scenario description

The analysis for O_3 is only based on the changes to the CRF. Since the risk is considered higher in WHO (2021), the WHO2021 scenario increases the magnitude of the health outcomes (over 30 %). If the counterfactual concentration were also changed, e.g., for SOMO10, the numbers would increase substantially (see Figure A2.3, Annex 2). Contrary to the other two pollutants, there is no clear decreasing trend in the population-weighted mean concentration. The exposure to $O₃$ varies substantially across the years since the O₃ concentrations are highly dependent on meteorology.

The following Figures indicate how the mortality outcomes due to $O₃$ levels in Europe in 2020 change across the countries depending on the baseline assumptions. Figure 4.6 shows the number of premature deaths and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants estimated based on the two baseline scenarios. The data supporting these Figures are available in Table A3.7 in Annex 2.

Figure 4.6: Number of premature deaths (top) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (per 100k inh) (bottom) due to exposure to O³ concentration levels in 2020 for individual countries on

Notes: please be aware of the different units in the Y-axes.

As expected, the new scenario (WHO2021) results in the highest estimations, albeit different from country to country, as it only depends on the ozone metric.

5 Combining both mortality and morbidity outcomes

Burden of disease is the impact of a health outcome (e.g., a disease) measured by different indicators, e.g. mortality, morbidity and costs. It is often quantified in terms of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALY). DALY is a core summary measure to assess the population's health status (GBD, 2019) based on both mortality and morbidity indicators.

DALYs can be calculated from the sum of YLL and years lived with disability (YLD). YLD measures years lost due to disability and it is estimated by combining the number of prevalent cases of a particular health outcome (P_o) and the disability weight factor (DW), according to Eq.5.1. DW reflects the severity of the disease on a scale from 0 (perfect health) to 1 (dead) (WHO, 2014). One DALY is one lost year of healthy life.

$$
YLDs = P_o * DW (5.1)
$$

An Eionet report on identifying relevant morbidity health outcomes is available (ETC HE, 2022a). This report focuses on the same ambient air pollutants and geographical coverage as the EEA/ETC HRA. It includes a selection of appropriate CRFs and underlying health data, and provides an adequate methodology for the morbidity-related burden of disease and estimates for 2019 for the following outcomes:

- PM2.5: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Ischemic Heart Disease, Lung Cancer, Diabetes Mellitus, Stroke, and Asthma (children).
- NO2: Asthma (adults), Diabetes Mellitus, Stroke.
- O_3 : Hospital admissions for respiratory diseases.

To estimate the DALYs attributable to air pollution, estimates on both cause-specific morbidity and mortality health outcomes are necessary. Therefore, the summation of YLLs from the all-cause approach and YLDs from a cause-specific approach is inadequate. A consistent approach would be adding the estimates for YLLs and YLDs for each specific cause and presenting the sum as the attributable burden. The next step would be to explore cause-specific mortality health outcomes aligned with the morbidity outcomes presented in (ETC HE, 2022a).

6 Conclusions

In 2020, the mortality associated with exposure to air pollution across Europe remained high, especially in central and south-eastern European countries. The largest mortality is attributable to $PM_{2.5}$, followed by NO₂ and O₃. The exposure to concentrations levels above the 2021 WHO AQ guideline levels in 2020 resulted in 275 000 premature deaths related to $PM_{2.5}$ exposure, and 64 000 to $NO₂$, across the 41 countries included in the assessment (40 in the case of $PM_{2.5}$). The short-term exposure to O_3 implied 28 000 premature deaths. For EU27, the attributed number of premature deaths for 2020 is 238 000, 49 000, and 24 000, respectively. When considering both the number of deaths and the age at which it occurs, the number of years of life lost for the 41 European countries is 2 773 000, 680 000, and 306 000 due to exposure to $PM_{2.5}$, NO₂, and O₃, respectively. For EU27, years of life lost (YLL per 100 000 inhabitants) are 2 410 000 (544), 484 000 (109), 249 000 (56), respectively.

The mortality related to air pollution is typically higher for countries with a larger population and lowest for countries with either small populations or low average population-weighted concentrations or a combination of both. When considering years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants, the situation might change dramatically, with the largest mortality being observed in central and south-eastern European countries due to exposure to $PM_{2.5}$.

The number of premature deaths attributed to air pollution in 2020 compared to 2019, increased for PM_{2.5} and decreased for $NO₂$ and $O₃$. Apart from the changes in concentrations and demographics, the COVID-19 pandemics seems to also have an influence on these changes. For PM_{2.5}, the reduction in concentrations were counteracted by the excess of deaths due to the pandemics. In the case of NO₂, the reduction in concentrations was more pronounced as a result of the lockdown measures and the drastic reduction in traffic and its impact in reducing mortality was bigger than the increasing impact of excess of deaths due to COVID-19.

Changing assumptions on CRFs and counterfactual concentrations have implications for estimating mortality health outcomes. The sensitivity analysis shows that it is not straightforward to assess which baseline scenario estimates the highest concentrations when both CRF and counterfactual concentration change. In this case, the final outcome will depend on the concentration at the grid-cell level. The EEA/ETC HRA methodology has been adapted based on the latest WHO recommendations (WHO, 2021) – both CRFs and AQG levels (counterfactual concentrations for $PM_{2.5}$, NO₂). Compared to the previous assumptions on CRF and counterfactial concentrations, these changes are expected to reduce the health outcomes for $PM_{2.5}$ and increase for NO_2 and O_3 . When aggregated to all countries, the health outcomes in 2020 are reduced by over 40 % for PM_{2.5} and increased by 50 % and 30 % for NO₂ and O₃, respectively. This change varies across countries depending on the concentration level the population of the individual country is exposed to.

To estimate the DALYs attributable to air pollution, estimates on both cause-specific morbidity and mortality health outcomes are necessary. For the future, a consistent approach would be adding the estimates for YLLs and YLDs for each specific outcome and presenting the sum as the attributable burden. A report on identifying relevant morbidity health outcomes is available (ETC HE, 2022a). The next step would be to explore cause-specific mortality health outcomes aligned with the morbidity outcomes presented in that report.

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8 List of abbreviations

Annex 1 Methodology

Estimation of health outcomes related to air pollution

For European ambient air pollution levels, the relative risk in a population whose exposure is estimated by an average concentration (RR_c) can be described as a log-linear function relating concentrations and mortality (Ostro, 2004; WHO, 2013), as specified below:

$$
RR_C = \exp\left[\beta\ (C - C_0)\right] \quad \text{(A1.1)}
$$

where, *C* is the concentration level the population is exposed to, C_0 is the baseline concentration, and β is based on the concentration-response factor (CRF) estimated by epidemiological studies *(CRF* depends on the pollutant and health outcome one wants to estimate, see Section 2 for more details on the concentration-response functions applied). *C0* can either be the background concentration (i.e., the level that would exist without any human-made pollution), a concentration below which no health effects are expected, or a counterfactual concentration level. β can be estimated as follows:

$$
\beta = \frac{\ln (CRF)}{UC}
$$
 (A1.2)

where *UC* is the unit of concentration.

According to WHO (2019), the population attributable fraction (PAF) can be used as a metric to assess the contribution of a risk factor to a disease or a death. PAF can be defined as the 'proportional reduction in population disease or mortality that would occur if exposure to a risk factor were reduced to an alternative ideal exposure scenario'. Assuming that the population is exposed to a single concentration level over the assessed period, PAF can be calculated based on the relative risk as follows:

$$
PAF = \frac{RR_C - 1}{RR_C} \quad \text{(A1.3)}
$$

Finally, a health outcome attributable to air pollution is estimated by:

health outcome =
$$
PAF \cdot MR \cdot Pop
$$
 (A1.4)

Where *MR* is the baseline incidence of the health effect expected for the population amount *Pop.* Since we are dealing with mortality, the term PAF indicates the proportional reduction in population death that would occur if exposure to a risk factor were reduced to an alternative ideal exposure scenario.

The HRA presented in this report focuses on estimating mortality-related health outcomes: the number of premature deaths and YLL. Mortality measures the number of deaths in a particular population due to a specific or non-discriminated cause. Premature deaths occur before a person reaches an expected age, thus considered preventable if their cause is eliminated. The so-called expected age is usually the life expectancy for a country, typically stratified by sex and age. This health outcome is estimated as follows:

$$
PD = PAF \sum_{a,s} CDR_{a,s} * Pop_{a,s} \tag{A1.5}
$$

where PD is the number of premature deaths, *CDRa,s* is the crude death rate by sex (s) and age (a) in a particular population due to a specific cause, and *Popa,s* is the population fraction stratified by age and sex.

YLL is defined as the years of potential life lost in the population due to premature mortality. It is an estimate of the average number of years that a person would have lived if the person had not died prematurely. YLL takes into account the life expectancy at the moment of death and is greater for deaths at a younger age and lower for deaths at an older age (Murray and Lopez, 1996). It gives, therefore, more nuanced information than the number of premature deaths alone. YLL is determined by relating CDR with life expectancy:

$$
YLL = PAF \sum_{a,s} CDR_{a,s} * Pop_{a,s} * LE_{a,s}
$$
 (A1.6)

where *LE*_{*a*,s} is the average time a person is expected to live, based on the year of birth, sex (s) and age (a).

For this HRA, Equations (A.1.1) to (A.1.6) are applied to every single grid cell of the concentration maps (*C* in A1.1). [Table 2.1](#page-7-0) and [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) describe the CRFs and *C0*'s used in this report. The health outcomes are then aggregated to country-level or larger areas, e.g., EU27.

Ambient air concentrations

Concentration maps with annual statistics of the relevant pollutant metrics are produced on a $1 * 1$ km² grid resolution for most of Europe (the whole Europe apart from Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and European parts of Russia and Kazakhstan; in the case of PM_{2.5} Türkiye is also excluded due to lack of enough background stations to produce the maps). The annual statistics are estimated using a mapping method, 'Regression – Interpolation – Merging Mapping' (RIMM) using a linear regression model followed by kriging of its residuals (ETC HE, 2022b and references herein). The mapping method combines the monitoring data from rural and urban background stations for $PM_{2.5}$, O₃, and NO₂ with results from the EMEP chemical transport model or CAMS Ensemble and other supplementary data, such as altitude, meteorology, and population density. Urban traffic station data was also included for $NO₂$ and PM_{2.5}, to account for hotspots, since traffic is the most important source of $NO₂$ and an important source of PM. Lastly, the rural and urban background (and for $NO₂$ and PM_{2.5} also urban traffic) map layers are merged into the final map and used as input data for the health risk assessment. Note that all the data supporting the RIMM refers to the year estimated.

A caveat for the concentration maps is the exclusion of overseas territories such as Madeira, Azores, Canary Islands, French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte, and Réunion. These territories are therefore excluded from the HRA calculations.

The ETC HE Report (ETC HE, 2022b) includes the analysis of the latest maps available, including the associated uncertainties.

Population

The population data is used for estimating the health outcomes, as the health outcomes result from collocating concentration levels and populating density. Thus, the higher the population density, the higher the population risk will be if concentrations are above the counterfactual concentrations. We use population density maps (gridded) based on the GEOSTAT 2011 dataset (Eurostat, 2014), the European population distribution in 2011. It is mapped on the same grid resolution as the ambient air concentrations presented above facilitating the health outcomes estimation per grid-cell. The GEOSTAT 2011 population data was scaled with the total population data available country-wise from Eurostat (Eurostat, 2022a) to make it consistent with the estimated year. The data reflects the total population on the 31st of December of the indicated year reported by the National Statistical Offices. This data has been available yearly since 1960 for all countries across Europe. The scaling of the population (scaled popi) was done by applying the following:

$$
scaled\ pop_i = pop_i \times \frac{pop_{c_Eurstat}}{pop_c}
$$
 (A1.3)

where pop_i is the population in the *ith* grid cell for country c in the GEOSTAT 2011 population density map, pop_c is the total population for country c calculated based on the GEOSTAT 2011 population density map, and $pop_{c\;Eurostat}$ is the total population reported to Eurostat for country *c* for the estimated year.

Since the concentration maps do not include overseas territories, population data for those territories need to be excluded from the original Eurostat data. Moreover, the GEOSTAT 2011 Cyprus population data includes Greek and Turkish Cypriots. The Eurostat data includes only Greek Cypriots, requiring the addition of the Turkish Cypriot population. These corrections mentioned above are done by applying additional scaling factors for France, Portugal, Spain, and Cyprus:

$$
scaled pop_i = pop_i \times \frac{pop_{c_Burostat}}{pop_c} \times \frac{pop_{c2015}}{pop_{c_Eurostat2015}}
$$
 (A1.3)

where pop_{c2015} is the total population for country *c* calculated based on the GEOSTAT 2011 population density map scaled for year 2015 (ETC/ATNI, 2018), and pop_c $_{Eurostat2015}$ is the total population reported to Eurostat for country *c* for the year 2015 (Eurostat, 2022a). Year 2015 was arbitrary selected as reference for performing the spatial scaling of population numbers due to computationally demanding task of rescaling the whole population density map for every single year. Plus, the ratios should remain fairly similar over the time.

The population distribution by age groups is required to estimate how many people have died per age group. Eurostat (2022b) provides data with a 1-year age interval, from 'less than a year' to 99 years old, for almost all countries assessed. Gap filling of missing information was necessary for several countries, years and age groups. It was done by using relative age distribution numbers (that is, the percentage of the population in each age group) from Serbia for other West Balkan countries, from Italy for San Marino, from France for Andorra and Monaco, and by applying average relative age distribution numbers from data available in 2005 – 2019 period for all other countries.

The population data have uncertainties inherent to statistical products and processes, and data completeness depends on the availability of raw data transmitted by the National Statistical Offices (ESS, 2012). Typically the data is available with two or more years of delay.

Demographic data

Data on the cause of death, number of natural deaths, and life expectancy are needed to calculate the health outcomes. The latter is needed only for estimating the years of life lost.

Eurostat data on causes of death (Eurostat, 2022c) is available since 2011 for 5-year interval, from less 'than 1 year' to '80 years or over'. It is compiled based on the ICD10 Mortality Tabulation List, the latest tabulation existing for mortality data. According to the description of the concentration-response functions (see [Table 2.1\)](#page-7-0), only natural deaths should be considered. Therefore, causes of death due to injury or poisoning (V01-Y89), unknown and unspecified causes (R00-R99), and total deaths due to all causes are excluded before calculations.

Estimating the number of natural deaths with a 1-year interval is based on interpolation using the ratio between all-natural deaths and all (natural + external) causes of death (5-year interval) and Eurostat data on the total number of deaths (Eurostat, 2022d) given with a 1-year interval.

After this operation, mortality data is aligned with life expectancy data, available from the Eurostat database (Eurostat, 2022e) on a 1-year interval, by age and sex, from 0 to 85+ years old, since 1960. Life expectancies are extrapolated for ages above 85, using regression on life expectancy data for age groups 79 – 85, to reflect all age groups available for mortality data (up to 95+).

Gap-filling was done for countries where the data described above is unavailable in the Eurostat datasets. Data on causes of death are available from 2011 onwards and that year is used as proxy for years 2005 - 2010. Afterwards, gap filling is performed for missing data on external causes of deaths using average of number of deaths due to external causes from previous 5 years. Then, missing numbers of deaths due to natural causes are gap-filled by subtracting the number of deaths due to external causes from the totals.

Data on the number of deaths and life expectancy are available for most countries since 2005. Nevertheless, for cases where data is unavailable, gap filling is performed using relative age distribution numbers of mortality (mortality ratios, or the number of deaths per population in each age group) and YLL ratios, following similar methodology as described for population numbers. Original data is used where possible, i.e., if the original life expectancy numbers exist, they are used for calculating YLL ratios, even if mortality ratios have to be gap-filled.

Similarly, as 2020 data on causes of death, death numbers and life expectancy are still unavailable in Eurostat for some countries, relative age distribution numbers of mortality (mortality ratios) and YLL (YLL ratios) are used from the last available year. Tables with the logic of gap filling of demographic data (Data set vs Health risk assessment year vs proxy country) is available upon request.

The demographic data have uncertainties inherent to statistical products and processes, and data completeness depends on the availability of raw data transmitted by the National Statistical Offices (ESS, 2012). Typically the data is available with two or more years of delay. The data may also be available in different age aggregations (single-year *vs.* 5-year age intervals).

Annex 2 Estimating risk: a general understanding

To better understand the impact of changing the CRFs and counterfactual concentrations, the risk of exposure to a certain concentration level $(1 \mu g/m^3$ increment) is plotted against the population exposed to the same concentration levels in 41 (40 for PM $_{2.5}$) European countries in 2005 and 2020. Figure A2.1, Figure A2.2 and Figure A2.3 show the risk estimation (see Eq. A1.1) based on the baseline and sensitivity scenarios (specific for each pollutant). The CRFs and counterfactual concentrations are described in [Table](#page-7-0) [2.1](#page-7-0) and [Table 2.2.](#page-7-1) The Figures also show the cumulative distribution of the European population exposed to the same levels of concentration for the analysis carried on in Section 4.

The CRF defines the slope of the risk function (assuming it has a linear shape) and the counterfactual concentration defines the lowest concentration level a population is exposed to that is considered in the estimation (risk of mortality = 1). Changing the CRF and assuming the same counterfactual concentration will impact the estimations linearly: the highest estimation will be based on the highest CRF and the difference between estimations will be higher when the concentration levels are higher.

Assuming a constant CRF and varying the counterfactual concentration implies that the higher the counterfactual concentrations, the lower the estimates will be. A lower counterfactual level implies that the risk analysis considers a larger range of concentration levels. When both CRF and counterfactual concentration vary, the concentration at the grid-cell level becomes a key factor in determining which scenario results in higher estimation since the functions tend to intersect at some point. For example, Figure A2.1 show the PM2.5 baseline scenarios (see [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for the description of the scenarios) intersect between 10 and 11 μg/m³ for WHO2013 and ELAPSE and between 22 and 23 μg/m³ for WHO2013 and WHO2021; Figure A2.2 show the NO₂ baseline scenarios intersect at between 25 and 26 μ g/m³ for WHO2013 and WHO2021 and between 66 and 67 μ g/m³ for WHO2013 and ELAPSE; and Figure A2.3 show no intersection for O_3 because the baseline scenarios assume the same counterfactual concentrations.

Figure A2.1 Mortality risk associated to exposure to PM2.5 concentration levels estimated based on the baseline scenarios (solid lines) and specific sensitivity scenarios (dashed lines) (see [Table](#page-7-1) [2.2\)](#page-7-1) and the percentage of the European population exposed above the same concentration levels in 2005 and 2020

Figure A2.2 Mortality risk associated to exposure to NO² concentration levels estimated based on the baseline scenarios (solid lines) and specific sensitivity scenarios (dashed lines) (see [Table](#page-7-1) [2.2\)](#page-7-1) and the percentage of the European population exposed above the same concentration levels in 2005 and 2020.

Figure A2.3 Mortality risk associated to exposure to O³ concentration levels estimated based on the baseline scenarios (solid lines) and specific sensitivity scenarios (dashed lines) (see [Table](#page-7-1) [2.2\)](#page-7-1) and the percentage of the European population exposed above the same concentration levels in 2005 and 2020

Annex 3 Tables with the data supporting the Figures

Table A3.1 Number of premature deaths due to exposure to PM2.5 concentration levels between 2005 and 2020 for all countries (except Türkiye) based on the baseline and sensitivity scenarios (se[e Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.2: Number of premature deaths related to exposure to PM2.5: comparing between specific scenarios and the adopted baseline scenario (WHO2021), relative to WHO2021 (see [Table](#page-7-1) [2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.3: Number of premature deaths due to exposure to NO² concentration levels between 2005 and 2020 for all countries based on the baseline and sensitivity scenarios (see [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.4 Number of premature deaths related to exposure to NO2: comparison between specific scenarios and the adopted baseline scenario (WHO2021), relative to WHO2021 (see [Table](#page-7-1) [2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.5: Number of premature deaths due to exposure to O³ concentration levels between 2005 and 2020 for all countries based on the baseline scenarios (see [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.6: Number of premature deaths related to exposure to O3: comparison between specific scenarios to baseline scenario WHO2021 (se[e Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

Table A3.7: Number of premature deaths (PD) and years of life lost per 100 000 inhabitants (YLL_per105) due to exposure to PM2.5, NO2, and O³ concentration levels in 2020 for individual countries for the baseline estimations (see [Table 2.2](#page-7-1) for scenario description)

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