

Embargoed: Not for publication before 3am BST, Wednesday June 17th 2020.

Big majority of people in five key countries want stricter regulation on air pollution

Results support calls for governments to prioritise clean air in COVID-19 recovery packages

At least two-thirds of citizens in Bulgaria, Great Britain, India, Nigeria and Poland support stricter laws and enforcement to tackle air pollution following the COVID-19 crisis, a new YouGov poll conducted on behalf of the Clean Air Fund (1) shows today. In Nigeria and India more than 90% of those surveyed wanted to see air quality improved in their area.

The poll - the first to pose these questions to citizens in several countries - also highlights that at least 71% of people surveyed are concerned about air pollution as a public health issue, and 76% as an environmental issue. A majority have noticed the air is cleaner following “lockdowns” prompted by COVID-19. The findings are published in the Clean Air Fund’s new briefing, “Breathing Space”.

“There is clear public demand for governments around the world to act on clean air - and no excuse not to. As lockdowns are eased and economies restarted, people are clear that they do not want a return to toxic air. That would simply replace one health crisis with another,” said Jane Burston, Executive Director of the Clean Air Fund.

Breathing Space highlights the close connections between COVID-19 and air pollution, and calls for governments to tackle them together in recovery plans. Toxic air has made millions vulnerable to the most severe impacts of COVID-19, resulting in more hospitalisations and deaths. This comes on top of the seven million premature deaths caused by air pollution every year, largely linked to strokes, heart disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer and acute respiratory infections. Air pollution particles can even act as carrier for the virus.

At the same time, air quality has improved near instantly as a result of decisive actions to protect public health through lockdowns. The briefing urges governments to use the unprecedented funds now being committed to recovery packages to lock in some of these benefits. Putting a joined-up strategy to tackle air pollution at the heart of the recovery would improve health, build resilience to future diseases, boost productivity, reduce health costs and help tackle climate change. The World Bank has calculated that air pollution costs the global economy \$225 billion each year in lost labour income.

Jane Burston: “Action to improve air quality is uniquely possible and popular right now. It would also help mitigate climate change, which has many of the same causes and also hits the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. Solutions already exist but they are not being scaled, copied or adapted with sufficient speed or focus. Governments must harness this widespread public support for actions to clean our air, and use post-COVID recovery packages to protect our health and environment.”

The Clean Air Fund is calling on leaders putting together recovery stimulus packages to:

- Develop and resource joint national health and environment strategies, with a specific focus on tackling air pollution.
- Make reducing air pollution a key element of economic stimulus packages.
- Support the repurposing of city streets for walking and cycling.
- Strengthen and enforce regulations to retain and build on the improvements in air quality experienced during the pandemic.
- Work with other governments to tackle transboundary pollution.

A London GP and Clinical Lecturer in Community Based Medical Education, QMUL said: “Amongst all the suffering we’ve seen due to COVID-19, one positive has been the chance to breathe cleaner air;

you can literally taste the difference. The reduction in traffic has also given me the confidence to cycle in London with my young son, and to encourage my patients to do the same. I'm not at all surprised these results show people don't want to go back to the bad old days of air pollution making us all sick. Let's make the 'new normal' healthier by putting air pollution at the centre of the response and recovery plans."

/ENDS

For a copy of the briefing, detailed survey data or interviews, please contact Oliver Courtney: oliver.courtney@digacommunications.com, +44 (0)7815 731889.

Notes to editors:

- 1) The Clean Air Fund is a philanthropic initiative with a mission to tackle air pollution around the world. We bring together funders, researchers, policy makers and campaigners to find and scale solutions that will provide clean air for all.
- 2) All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,005 British adults, 1006 Bulgarian Adults, 1005 Polish Adults, 501 Nigerian Adults, and 1008 Indian Adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 22nd May - 2st June 2020. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all adults (aged 18+) in GB, Bulgaria, Poland, and India. The data has been weighted to be representative of the online population in Nigeria
- 3) The briefing will be published at www.cleanairfund.org/breathingspace after embargo lifts.
- 4) A breakdown of the polling results will be published at www.cleanairfund.org/breathingspacesurvey after embargo lifts.
- 5) A sample of answers to key questions:

Question	Nigeria	GB	Poland	Bulgaria	India
% of people are very or fairly worried about air pollution as a public health issue	92	71	91	91	86
% of people are very or fairly worried about air pollution as an environmental issue	94	76	93	93	90
% who support stricter laws and/or enforcement of regulations on air quality?	94	67	72	85	85

% who say they've personally noticed air quality get better since the COVID-19 outbreak began.	65	52	51	61	87
--	----	----	----	----	----