

**CLEAN  
AIR  
FUND**

# **CLEARING THE AIR**

**The State of Global  
Philanthropy on Air Quality**

The Clean Air Fund is funded by:



# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE IMPACT OF AIR POLLUTION</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>ABOUT THIS REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>THE STATE OF GLOBAL AIR QUALITY GIVING</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>GET INVOLVED</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>16</b>

This report is written by the Clean Air Fund, a global philanthropic initiative that works to combat air pollution, improve human health and accelerate decarbonisation.

This report has been made possible by the generous data sharing of leading foundations in the air quality field.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Air pollution has a devastating impact. More than 90% of people globally are breathing air that is damaging their health. Outdoor air pollution results in 4.2 million deaths each year, including almost 300,000 children under five. The outdoor air pollution crisis is escalating at an appalling rate in many countries and is projected to get much worse: without aggressive intervention, the number of deaths due to outdoor air pollution are expected to increase by more than 50% by 2050.<sup>1</sup>

Tackling air pollution will not just improve health but can bring multiple benefits to issues including climate change, children's development and equity.

This report summarises the trends in leading global philanthropic foundation funding on air quality over the past four years. It analyses the investments made to date and provides an overview of the geographies and types of projects being funded.

## The report finds that:

- Leading foundations have increased funding on air quality from approximately \$9m in 2015 to just under \$30m in 2018.
- Although air quality grants were made in 19 countries and regions by 2018, three-quarters of funding was spent on air quality projects in just three countries: China, India and the USA.
- The primary activities supported by these grants are communications and policy related activities, which make up more than two thirds of the funding. While foundation funding targeted at achieving clean air is increasing, the total amount of funding remains incredibly small in comparison to its impact on health and the funding available to other health issues. As a comparative example, in 2017 \$800 was spent by foundations for every HIV-related death; while in 2018, \$7 was spent by foundations

for every death related to outdoor air pollution.

- The number of foundations funding air quality projects in this analysis increased from 9 in 2015 to 29 in 2018. Over the same period, the number of grantees grew three-fold, from 46 to 123.

## The report recommends that:

- The amount of funding to outdoor air quality projects must urgently increase, as the current level of funding directed to the issue is not proportional to the scale of the problem.
- The number of countries in which air quality grants are made should increase as the level of funding grows. Air pollution is a global problem but the burden on health is disproportionately higher in poorer countries. Organisations in many low-income countries currently receive very small amounts of foundation funding for air quality projects. For example, less than 0.5% of foundation funding on air quality is spent in Africa.
- As the amount of funding and number of stakeholders acting on air quality increases, so should efforts to engage, share information and coordinate across partners. As foundations create networks and means for collaboration, it is important to reach out to and include other types of funding – such as development agencies – to ensure that all sources of funding are working together to achieve the greatest possible impact in the shortest amount of time.
- Now is the time for foundations to invest on the issue of air quality. The field is growing quickly, presenting an opportunity for forward-thinking foundations to be at the forefront of building capacity in the sector. This can achieve rapid impact and deliver multiple co-benefits.

“The statistics around the health impacts of air pollution are truly devastating – nine out of ten people globally breathe polluted air, causing increased levels of asthma, cancer, heart disease, strokes and cognitive dysfunction.



**MARIA NEIRA**  
Director, Public Health,  
Environmental and Social  
Determinants of Health,  
World Health Organization

Great strides have been made in reducing the burden of many diseases over the last decades, by the far-sighted leaders of philanthropic foundations around the world.

This report demonstrates how we now need these organisations to turn their attention to the health emergency of air pollution and join forces with the Clean Air Fund to provide the resources needed to ensure everyone has clean air to breathe.”

# 4.2 million

outdoor air pollution deaths each year, including almost 300,000 children under five.

# CLEAN AIR IS A HUMAN RIGHT

## THE IMPACT OF AIR POLLUTION

Clean air is a human right. Yet more than 90% of the world's population – approximately 6.8 billion people – live in places where the air they breathe is damaging their health.<sup>2</sup>

Outdoor air pollution results in 4.2 million deaths each year, including almost 300,000 children under five.<sup>3</sup> The death toll from air pollution is larger than that caused by tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and malaria combined.<sup>1</sup>

The issue is getting more urgent. In the absence of aggressive intervention, the number of deaths due to outdoor air pollution is forecast to more than double by 2050.<sup>1</sup> This is in contrast to other environmental health risks such as indoor air pollution and unsafe water and sanitation, which are being tackled at scale and are expected to decline by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

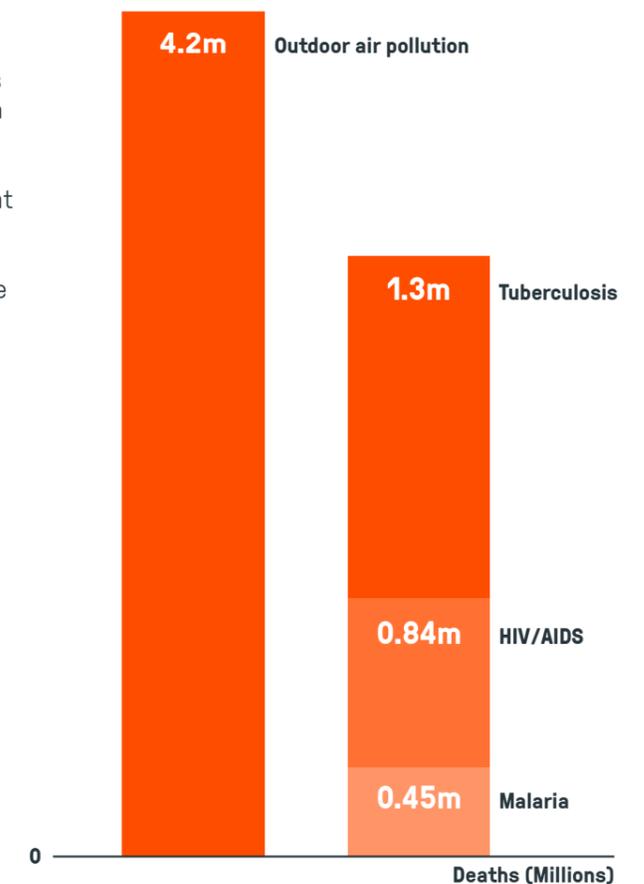
Air pollution has serious effects on child health and development. Exposure during pregnancy and childhood increases infant mortality, triggers asthma attacks and leads to reduced lung growth and cognitive development.<sup>3</sup>

Air pollution is an equity issue. Over ninety percent of deaths from outdoor air pollution occur in low- and middle- income countries.<sup>2</sup> In all parts of the world, those living in poverty are more likely to live in areas of high pollution, such as near busy roads and industrial sites.

Tackling air pollution will not just save lives, but can also inject urgency into the climate change agenda. The causes of climate change are often the same as the causes of air pollution: transport, the power sector, industrial emissions and crop burning. A greater understanding of the health effects of air pollution helps people to understand the impact on local schools, communities and individuals, motivating urgent public action.

In short, air pollution impacts multiple global issues: including health, children's development, equity, and climate change.

**FIGURE 1: 2016 DEATHS FROM OUTDOOR AIR POLLUTION<sup>7</sup>**



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

The purpose of this report is to summarise the trends in global foundation funding on air quality. The report looks at data over the past four years, from 2015 to the last full year of available data, 2018. It analyses investments made to date and provides an overview of the geographies and types of projects being funded. The report contains four recommendations to improve the effectiveness and impact of future funding.

This analysis has been made possible by the generous data sharing of leading foundations currently investing in mitigating air pollution.

This report is representative of global philanthropic foundation funding on air quality, referred throughout as ‘foundation funding’. It focusses on direct air quality funding, i.e. where the primary objective of the grant was to improve air quality. Projects where air quality improvement was a benefit but not the main purpose of the grant are not included. Effort has gone into ensuring that major funders of air quality are represented and that the analysis is as comprehensive as possible.

More details about the methodology can be found on page 15.



**CHRISTIANA FIGUERES**  
Founding Partner, Global Optimism and Former Executive Secretary, UNFCCC (2010–2016)

“Scientists have shown us that fossil fuel driven air pollution is the greatest threat to human health. But there are solutions to reverse the devastating health impacts of air pollution and to help stop climate change.

This will require leadership and funding to develop alternative technology, carry out research and involve civil society in campaigning on this urgent topic.

We need many leaders from many sectors around the world, including politicians, business and civil society to commit to work together and take bold action now to clean up the air and protect the health of billions of people. The Clean Air Fund initiative is perfectly placed to work with funders from health, environment and climate change to ensure we achieve these urgent goals. This report will be invaluable to philanthropists to show where investment is already being made and what more needs to be done.”

# THE STATE OF GLOBAL AIR QUALITY GIVING

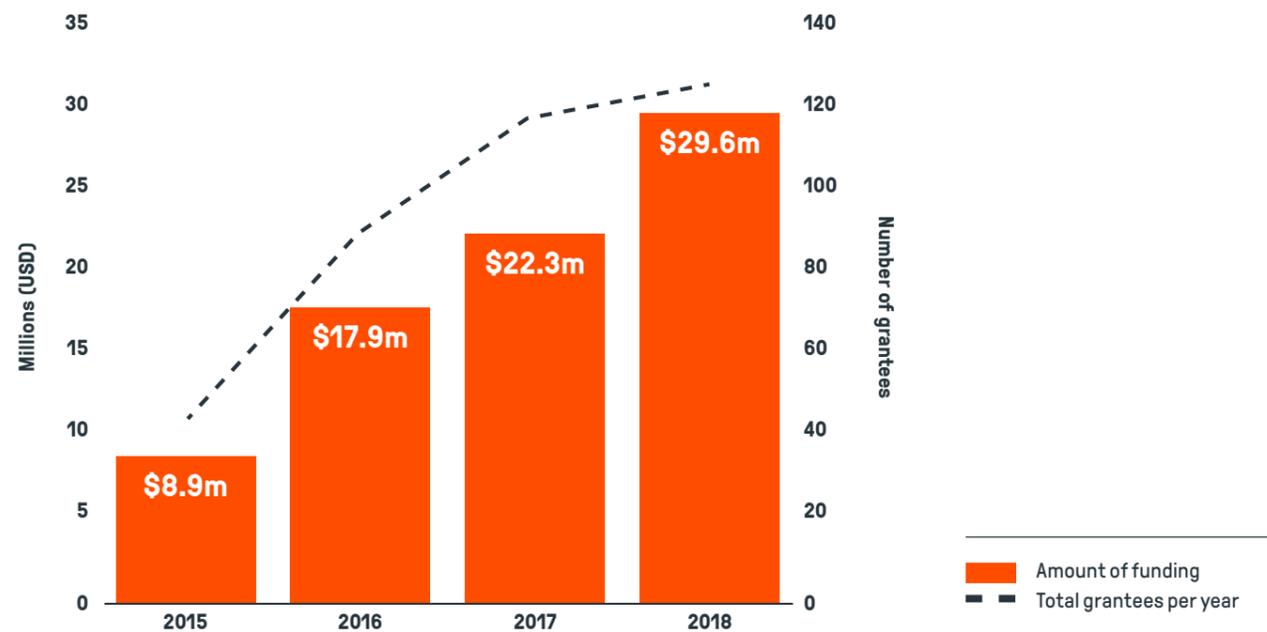
**ANNUAL FOUNDATION FUNDING ON AIR QUALITY HAS INCREASED STEADILY SINCE 2015, FROM ALMOST \$9M IN 2015 TO JUST UNDER \$30M IN 2018.**

Grant-making to air quality totalled \$79m over the last four years. It increased from \$8.9m in 2015 to \$29.6m in 2018, which represents an average increase of 53% per year.

In 2015 air quality grants went to just 46 organisations worldwide. This number increased nearly three-fold over the four year period to 123 grantee organisations in 2018.

The average grant size increased from \$194k per organisation in 2015 to \$241k per organisation in 2018.

**FIGURE 2: TOTAL ANNUAL FOUNDATION FUNDING AND NUMBER OF GRANTEES, 2015–2018**



**MORE THAN THREE QUARTERS OF FOUNDATION FUNDING ON AIR QUALITY IS SPENT IN THREE COUNTRIES: CHINA, INDIA, AND THE USA.**

Over the past four years, over a third of foundation funding for air quality (41%) was granted to projects in China. Projects in the USA and India each received nearly 18% of foundation funding, meaning that more than three quarters of funding in this analysis went to organisations in only three countries.

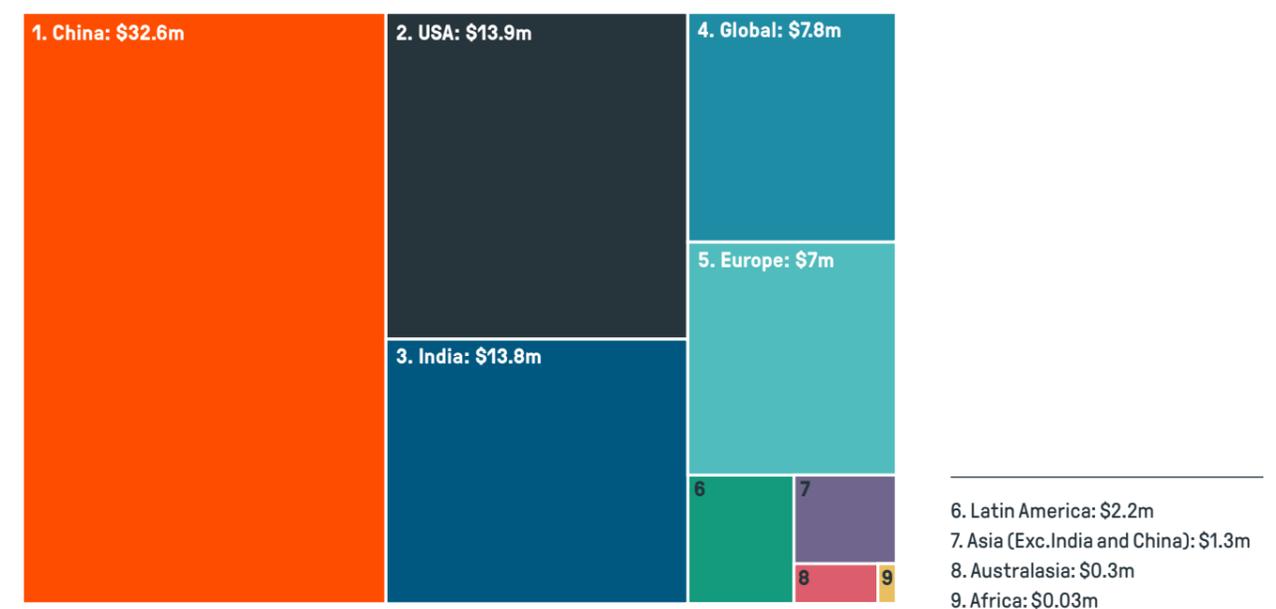
European grantees received nearly 9% of foundation funding. Of this, the majority was donated to pan-European programmes (44%), with high proportions also going to projects in the UK (36%) and Poland (12%). Projects in the Western Balkans, Germany and Turkey make up the remaining funding (~3% each).

Grantees in the rest of the world – including all countries in Latin America, Africa, Australasia and Asia (excluding India and China) – receive a combined 5% of total foundation funding on air quality, with the continent of Africa receiving the lowest percentage (less than 0.5%).

Funding to projects across multiple countries and those that are global in nature made up the remainder (10%).

**Note:** Europe includes pan-European grants and grants made in the UK, Poland, Turkey, Germany and the Western Balkans. Asia (excluding China & India) includes grants made in Indonesia, Japan, Nepal and Southeast Asia. Latin America includes grants made in Mexico and Brazil.

**FIGURE 3: FOUNDATION FUNDING BY REGION, 2015–2018**



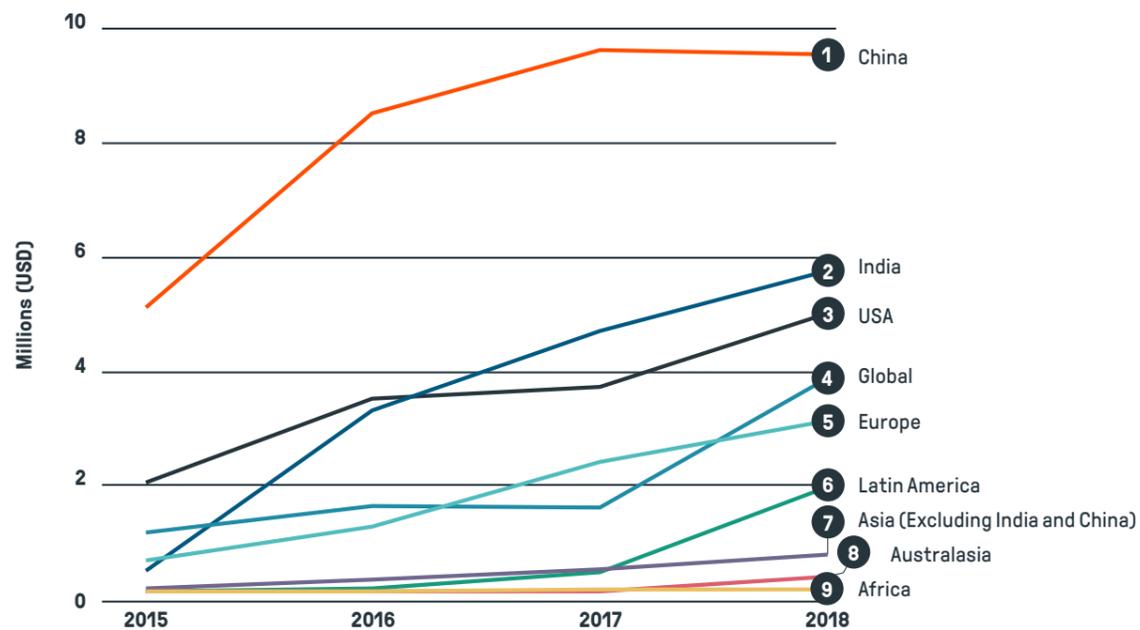
**THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES AND REGIONS IN WHICH AIR QUALITY GRANTS HAVE BEEN MADE ALMOST DOUBLED FROM 10 IN 2015, TO 19 IN 2018.**

In all regions air quality funding has increased over the past four years. The largest growth was in India, in which foundation funding to air quality projects increased more than 14 times between 2015 and 2018, from \$0.4m to \$5.7m.

Foundation funding on air quality in China grew sharply between 2015 and 2016, but slowed the following year and flattened between 2017 and 2018. Similarly, foundation funding to air quality projects that were global or multi-regional in nature showed no growth between 2016 and 2017. These were the only two periods without growth in all funding analysed.

The number of countries and regions in which air quality grants have been made almost doubled over the past four years, from 10 in 2015 to 19 in 2018.

**FIGURE 4: REGIONAL TRENDS IN FOUNDATION FUNDING, 2015–2018**



**FOUNDATION FUNDING ON AIR QUALITY HAS FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON COMMUNICATIONS AND POLICY ACTIVITIES.**

Foundation funding to Communications and Policy activities made up more than two thirds of air quality grants over the past four years.

The imbalance of grant-making across activities is not indicative of an imbalance in delivery, as other funders often prioritise different areas. For example, ‘technical’ work, such as implementation of monitoring networks and determining what the sources of air pollution are, is an activity often funded by development agencies; ‘implementation’, such as procurement of clean infrastructure, is typically funded by governments and development banks.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Technical:** To improve the amount, availability, transparency, accuracy or accessibility of air quality information and data.

**Impacts:** To increase understanding of the impact of air pollution on health, the environment and the economy.

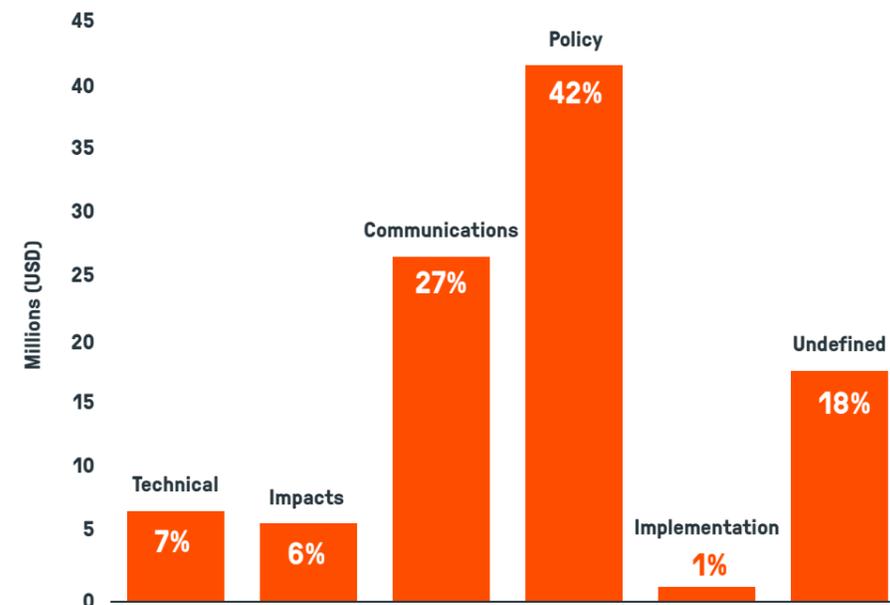
**Communications:** To raise awareness of air pollution, including campaigning, communications and events.

**Policy:** To develop, promote, and transform public policies on air quality.

**Implementation:** To invest in the implementation of infrastructure to improve air quality.

**Undefined:** To support core costs of an organisation focussed on air quality or where it was not possible to assign a strategy based on the information provided.

**FIGURE 5: TOTAL FOUNDATION FUNDING BY ACTIVITY TYPE, 2015–2018**



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 FOUNDATION FUNDING ON AIR QUALITY NEEDS TO URGENTLY INCREASE TO ADDRESS WORSENING AIR QUALITY.

Globally, it is estimated that more than \$150 bn is invested each year by philanthropic foundations across all issues.<sup>5</sup> Foundation funding on outdoor air quality represents just 0.02% of this total (\$30m in 2018).

While foundation funding to air quality projects increased by an average of 53% year on year between 2015 and 2018, the level of funding is not proportional to the scale of the problem.

As a comparative example, foundations have increased funding to HIV-related projects significantly over time, and spent approximately \$800 for every HIV-related death in 2017.<sup>6</sup> The impact has been transformative: HIV-related deaths reduced by 46% – from 1.5 million to 800,000 – between 2007 and 2017. At 2018 funding levels, foundations spent approximately \$7 for every death related to outdoor air pollution.

The rate of growth for foundation funding to air pollution must urgently increase in order to mitigate outdoor air pollution on a global scale. Forward-thinking foundations can seize this opportunity, to make an impact where there is a significant gap in funding and where it is needed most.

## 2 FOUNDATIONS SHOULD INCREASE THE NUMBER OF COUNTRIES IN WHICH THEY MAKE AIR QUALITY GRANTS, ESPECIALLY TO TARGET THE INEQUITABLE BURDEN OF AIR POLLUTION.

Many low-income countries, especially in Africa, receive very little foundation funding for air quality projects. This is despite the WHO estimating that 9 out of 10 deaths from outdoor air pollution occur in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup> Increasing funding to low- and middle- income countries can help to tackle the profoundly inequitable burden of disease.

Amidst rapid urbanisation, early investment, such as investment in city planning and in the development of policies to incentivise renewable energy and sustainable transport, can prevent pollution ‘lock in’ for decades to come. Foundations could look to fund projects that avoid future pollution as well as those that address existing high levels.

Diversification of funding should not divert funding from existing geographies. Despite progress being made, substantial and long-term investment will still be needed in all countries where grants are currently being made in order to support the transition to clean air.

## 3 FUNDERS OF ALL KINDS SHOULD SHARE INFORMATION ON AIR QUALITY PROJECTS AND COORDINATE EFFORTS TO ENSURE GREATEST IMPACT.

The volume of foundation funding for air quality projects is growing. This, alongside the rise in the number of countries and regions in which projects are funded and a large uptick in the number of foundations that are prioritising air quality in their grant-making, means that information-sharing and collaboration between funders is increasingly important.

Efforts are underway – this report and the creation of the Clean Air Fund are two recent examples – and foundation collaboration on air quality is strong in a handful of countries. However, the cross-cutting nature of air quality means that existing networks are unlikely to comprise all relevant parties; air quality projects attract funding from foundations with a focus on many diverse topics, including health, children, climate change, equity and conservation, and it is unusual to find places where all of these funders come together.

Development agencies are also increasing their focus on air quality. Although data concerning their projects is not included in this analysis, they have the potential to allocate very significant resources to the topic in the coming years. As foundations begin to create networks and collaborate, reaching out to and including development agencies will be important. We must coordinate efforts across all sources of funding to achieve the greatest possible impact in the shortest amount of time.

## 4 THE AIR QUALITY FIELD IS GROWING BUT FROM A LOW BASE. THIS REPRESENTS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR FORWARD-THINKING FOUNDATIONS TO INVEST EARLY AND ACHIEVE RAPID IMPACT.

The number of foundations funding air quality projects in this analysis increased from 9 in 2015 to 29 in 2018. Over the same period, the number of grantees grew three-fold, from 46 to 123.

The early stage of this work presents an opportunity to both build and shape the field, and to achieve rapid impact. Working on air quality has many co-benefits. It directly contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 3, 10, and 13, promoting health and well-being for all, the reduction of inequality within and among countries, and climate action, respectively.

# GET INVOLVED

Delivering clean air for all will require deep partnerships and collaboration across philanthropic foundations and many other organisations.

The Clean Air Fund is a global philanthropic initiative that supports organisations around the world working to combat air pollution, improve human health and accelerate decarbonisation.

The Fund works with a coalition of philanthropic foundation partners who have interests in health, children, climate change and equity, bringing them together to strengthen their collective investment, voice and impact.

To find out more about the Clean Air Fund, or to contribute data to future iterations of this report, please contact [info@cleanairfund.org](mailto:info@cleanairfund.org) or visit [www.cleanairfund.org](http://www.cleanairfund.org)

# METHODOLOGY

**The following approach was taken to ensure consistency in this report:**

- Data collection has been achieved through a combination of direct engagement with leading foundations known to be granting on air pollution and existing data obtained from public sources. In total, 35 leading philanthropic foundations are represented in this analysis.
- Grants included here are those that were made to directly improve air quality: that is, any grant where mitigating air pollution was the primary objective of the grant. We have not included grants where improvement to air quality is an indirect or secondary objective of the grant, such as carbon dioxide mitigation projects.
- Grants that span multiple years were assumed to be spread evenly over those years. This is to prevent very large grants awarded in a single year but granted across multiple years significantly skewing the data.
- In the few instances where no end-date was assigned to a grant, the duration of the grant was assumed to be one year.
- A grant invested in more than one country is categorised as a global or multi-regional grant.
- Europe includes pan-European grants and grants made in the UK, Poland, Turkey, Germany and the Western Balkans. Asia (excluding China & India) includes grants made in Indonesia, Japan, Nepal and Southeast Asia. Latin America includes grants made in Mexico and Brazil.
- The vast majority of grants were reported in USD. Those that were not have been converted using a consistent exchange rate.

All figures are best estimates based on available data and will be updated annually as new data becomes available.

The report does not include government funding, for example from development agencies, or corporate donations. Nor does it include the efforts of the many individuals globally that donate to or volunteer with the air quality sector.

Particular thanks go to the numerous foundations that have contributed their information to inform this analysis, and to the ClimateWorks Foundation for their support in developing this report.

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# CLEAN AIR FUND

Clean Air is a Human Right.

90% of the world's population –  
approximately 6.8 billion  
people – live in places where  
the air they breathe is damaging  
their health.

The issue is getting more urgent.

We believe in a world where  
everyone can breathe clean air.

Help us make it happen.

Interested in joining forces?

[info@cleanairfund.org](mailto:info@cleanairfund.org)

[www.cleanairfund.org](http://www.cleanairfund.org)

[🐦 @cleanairfund](https://twitter.com/cleanairfund)