

Interactive comment on “Ground-based validation of the Copernicus Sentinel-5p TROPOMI NO₂ measurements with the NDACC ZSL-DOAS, MAX-DOAS and Pandonia global networks” by Tijl Verhoelst et al.

Tijl Verhoelst et al.

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Dear referee,

Many thanks for your careful reading of our manuscript, and for the valuable feedback. We address your concerns below (and in a modified version of the manuscript).

Referee comment: A consistent theme in the validation process is the underes-

estimate of column NO₂ compared to ground-based measurements, both MAX-DOAS and direct sun. The main effect causing the differences is area averaging over the TROPOMI pixel compared to the very local observations from ground-based instruments. Agreement when pollution effects are small or zero is quite good because the stratospheric component of NO₂ is much more spatially homogeneous. The disagreement increases as the pollution level increases along with spatial inhomogeneity. In the present document, the authors treat the spatial averaging effect as uncertain. A comparison of TROPOMI with the larger OMI area averaging effect from its larger pixel size should be convincing. The paper should include a stronger statement about the effect of area averaging on ground-based validation of TROPOMI.

Answer: Indeed, the underestimation of tropospheric columns (and of total columns when these contain a significant tropospheric contribution) in the S5p product is a clear outcome of our comparisons, which is fully in line with the outcomes of other comparable validation exercises, both on S5p and on other satellite NO₂ data sets. While differences in area averaging most certainly contribute to this, and while this may have been the dominant effect in the underestimation by larger-footprint sounders such as GOME, GOME-2, and OMI, we are less certain it is the dominant cause in our S5p comparisons, for the following reasons:

- The S5p pixel size is much smaller than that of the other sounders, and it is comparable to larger emission sources (cities, harbours, . . .). The footprint is still (much) larger than that of the MAX-DOAS or Pandora, but unless the latter is really positioned near the peak of the emission source, the difference in area averaging can work both ways (i.e. not necessarily leading to an underestimation, but mostly increasing the scatter).*
- In a preceding study on OMI vs. MAX-DOAS and Pandora (Compernelle et al. 2020), we already concluded that area-averaging can not be the sole cause, and that short-comings in the assumed vertical profile, in particular in polluted conditions, probably is a key effect. This is corroborated, for S5p, by several studies demonstrating the reduction in negative bias by replacing the a priori profile with one taken from a more detailed regional*

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model (e.g. Ialongo et al., AMT., 13, 205–218, 2020; Tack et al., AMTD 2020-148). While this is to some extent also a horizontal resolution effect (of the underlying profile climatology/model), it is not an NO₂ area averaging effect in itself.

- A similar effect is found for assumed aerosol concentrations (Liu et al, AMTD 2019-500)
- An upcoming improved cloud product, a key input to the NO₂ retrieval, has already been demonstrated to reduce the underestimation (Eskes et al, in prep.).

A comparison between OMI and TROPOMI comparisons should indeed show the impact (i.e. a stronger underestimation) of the larger area averaging of OMI, but it can be argued (as done above) that this does not imply a similar scale issue for TROPOMI vs. MAX-DOAS or Pandora (because TROPOMI is starting to resolve the emission sources, which is much less the case for OMI). We have now mentioned the effect of area averaging explicitly in the abstract, and it is put in perspective (along the same lines as described above) starting at line 389.

Line 27: nitrates, which are -> *fixed*

Line 30: local national regulations limiting boundary -> *fixed*

Line 47: on a global scale -> *fixed*

Line 51: Onwards -> *fixed*

Line 109: processor versions to which this corresponds -> *fixed*

Line 294: the referenced site does not contain all the data that were used in this paper. -> *These 2 websites (EVDC and PGN) should together contain all the data, as that is where we obtained them. Please provide us with more specifics if something is missing on these archives.*

Interactive comment on Atmos. Meas. Tech. Discuss., doi:10.5194/amt-2020-119, 2020.

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Dear referee,

Many thanks for your valuable feedback on our paper. We address your concerns below (and in a modified version of the manuscript).

Lines 150-155: 1) Please address the accuracy of the stratospheric NO₂ column retrieved from the ZSL-DOAS. (2) Temporal resolution of the ZSL-DOAS data and

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differences of measurement time between the ZSL-DOAS and TROPOMI needs to be discussed. (3) Spatial coverage of the ZSL-DOAS data need also to be specified.

Answer: This information is presented in the manuscript in lines 164 to 173 (geographical distribution and accuracy), and in the Section thereafter (differences in measurement time and horizontal sensitivity). For the exact dimensions of the footprint, see our answer to the following comment.

Line 184: Please specify how large footprint which tropospheric (we assume stratospheric is meant) NO₂ are averaged over. It can be a specific area size or a range of the area sizes. It will help the readers quantitatively understand the horizontal representativeness of the stratospheric NO₂ column from the ZSL-DOAS.

Answer: We added at line 187 that the length of this footprint is of the order of 300-600 km in the direction of the sun, and the width is typically of the order of 50-100 km at mid latitudes, depending on the duration of sunrise and sunset.

Line 189: “A small negative bias”: I recommend not to use “bias” unless ZSL DOAS accuracy is proven to be much higher than that of TROPOMI or space borne UV hyperspectral sensors.

Answer: Agreed, we replaced “bias” with “median difference”, also in the part of the discussion related to the stratospheric columns.

Lines 211-220: The manuscript addresses that there is an issue of 10% over-estimation of the PGN NO₂ data at high altitude stations due to using cross sections at a single temperature. Please consider removing the Section 3.4 since of the PGN NO₂ data at high altitude stations is not accurate enough for validating stratospheric NO₂ from TROPOMI as the authors also mention it.

Answer: The use of cross sections at a single (tropospheric) temperature in the PGN data processing indeed deserves a clear caveat. However, as the effect is “only” of the order of 10%, we believe it still makes sense to show the results: With or without a hypothetical 10% correc-

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tion, they independently confirm that TROPOMI stratospheric columns are not severely biased. We have added another explicit caveat on this issue in the PGN data presentation in Section 5.1.

Figure 7: Y Axis: (1) Why using SAT-GND? All other figures use “TROPOMI”. For consistency, please consider using something like “TROPOMI-ZSLDOAS” or anything better. (2) Please enlarge the figure and explain what the colors represent in the caption?

Answer: *This is fixed in a new version of the figure.*

Section 4.1 and 4.3: (1) Authors need to address quantitative differences of tropospheric NO₂ columns retrieved from various MAX-DOAS instruments and their algorithms. (2) Errors and accuracy of the retrieved tropospheric NO₂ column needs to be both quantitatively and qualitatively addressed before discussing comparison results in Section 4.3.

Answer: *Information on the retrieval methods used for the different MAX-DOAS data sets has been added in table A2 and, while the assessment of the differences in tropospheric NO₂ VCD due to the use of MAX-DOAS spectrometers with various instrumental performance levels and different retrieval algorithms, and hence different systematic and random uncertainty sources, is complex, the following discussion is added to Sect. 4.1 (including a new figure added to the supplement and copied at the bottom of this Author Comment):*

Published total uncertainty estimate on the NO₂ tropospheric VCD are of the order of 7-17% in polluted conditions, including both random (around 3 to 10% depending on the instrument) and systematic (11 to 14%) contributions (Irie et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2011; Hendrick et al., 2014; Kanaya et al., 2014). These ranges are more or less confirmed by the uncertainties reported in the data files, as visualized in Fig A.1 in the supplement. Nevertheless, differences in the reported uncertainties and in the actual measurement of the same scene between individual instruments are sometimes larger and the main potential sources of these inhomogeneities are listed below:

- *Different uncertainty reporting strategy: the reported systematic uncertainty may include only that from the NO₂ cross sections (approx. 3%; UNAM, BIRA-IASB, MPIC, AUTH, IUPB) or it may include also a contribution from the VCD retrieval step (up to 14% in JAMSTEC data and 20% in KNMI data).*
- *Different SCD retrieval: Recommended common DOAS settings are used by all groups in the present study, and if doing so, instrument intercomparison campaigns like CINDI-1 and -2 (Roscoe et al., 2010; Kreher et al., 2020) revealed relative biases between 3 and 10% in DSCD.*
- *Different VCD retrieval methods: Using either (1) vertical profile inversion using optimal estimation (BIRA-IASB, UNAM), (2) profile inversion using parameterized profile shapes (JAMSTEC and ChibaU), (3) direct retrieval via the calculation of a tropospheric AMF (QA4ECV datasets), or (4) direct retrieval using a geometrical approximation, can lead to systematic differences in the 5-15% range (Vlemmix et al., 2015b, and Friess et al., 2019).*

Consequently, expert judgment on the total uncertainty at the network level yields a conservative estimate of 30% uncertainty in polluted conditions. Ongoing efforts to harmonise MAX-DOAS tropospheric NO₂ data processing, e.g. as part of the ESA FRM4DOAS project, should help minimizing such network inhomogeneities in the near future.

Lines: 264-280: (1) Please address major factors that cause the difference between tropospheric NO₂ column data obtained from MAX-DOAS and TROPOMI. (2) Please discuss the possible reason for larger discrepancy at more polluted sites. I personally think one of the things that authors need to do is to compare aerosol properties and aerosol extinction profiles used to retrieve tropospheric NO₂ column between MAXDOAS and TROPOMI.

Answer: *An extensive discussion of known and potential causes for the discrepancy at polluted*

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sites is indeed only provided (much) further on in the manuscript (in Section 6, near line 360). We have entered a reference to this discussion section at line 281.

Concerning the impact of the aerosols properties: This is difficult to assess qualitatively as only a subset of the MAX-DOAS stations report the AOD used in the retrieval (and this can be the one coming from the O4 analysis, from an AOD climatology as for the QA4ECV cases, or from co-located AERONET instruments), and in the TROPOMI files, only the aerosol_index_354_388 information is provided. Still, we agree it requires further discussion in the manuscript. Consequently, this possible source of discrepancies is now discussed in more detail in the 2nd bullet point in the Discussion. In particular, the following information was added:

Somewhat related to the vertical sensitivity is the treatment of aerosol optical depth and its vertical profile. Poor representation of the aerosol opacity has been shown (from simulations) to cause both underestimated NO₂ in satellite retrievals and overestimated NO₂ in MAX-DOAS measurements (Leitao et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2013; Jin et al., 2016). Satellite-ground discrepancies in previous validation studies have already been attributed to such aerosol issues (Boersma et al., 2018; Compernolle et al., 2020). Moreover, explicit aerosol corrections in the S5p retrievals have already been shown to improve the agreement (Liu et al., 2020).

Section 5: Total column validation: Is there any problem associated with cross section at a single temp.? Please clarify it since there is the issue at Section 3.

Answer: Very pertinent point. The results at “clean sites” should indeed be interpreted with care as the PGN data are believed to be overestimated here by approx. 10%. This would suggest an actual positive mean difference (bias) for TROPOMI of similar size when little pollution is present, i.e. when the column is mostly stratospheric. Such a statement was added to the paper near line 340 (besides the clear caveat already formulated at the introduction of the PGN data). Note that this is somewhat at odds with the slight negative mean difference found in the ZSL-DOAS comparisons and probably reflects the true accuracy of the ground-based data, which should thus be taken to be of the order of +/- 10% at best.

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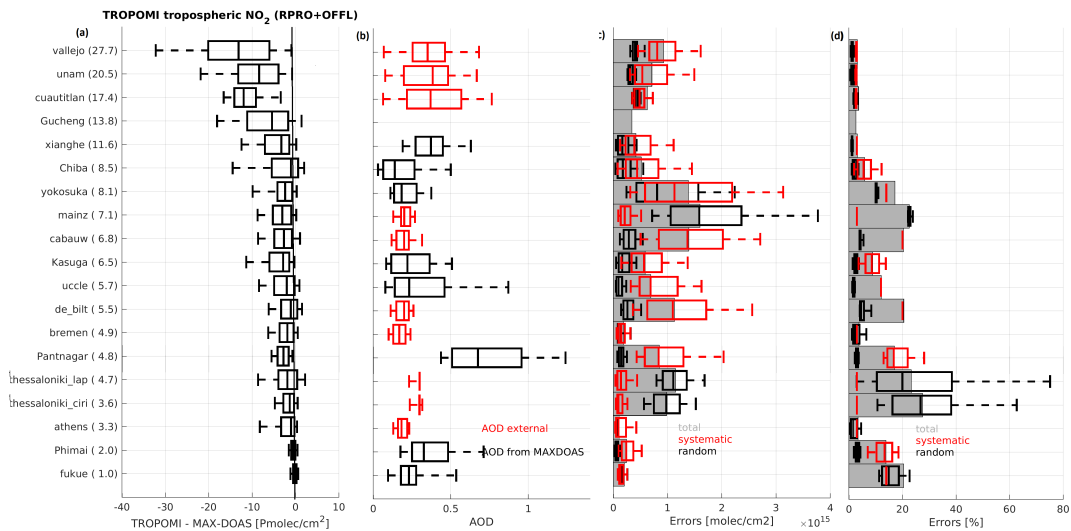


Fig. 1.

Ground-based validation of the Copernicus Sentinel-5p TROPOMI NO₂ measurements with the NDACC ZSL-DOAS, MAX-DOAS and Pandonia global networks

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Abstract. This paper reports on consolidated ground-based validation results of the atmospheric NO₂ data produced operationally since April 2018 by the TROPOMI instrument on board of the ESA/EU Copernicus Sentinel-5 Precursor (S5p) satellite. Tropospheric, stratospheric, and total NO₂ column data from S5p are compared to correlative measurements collected from, respectively, 19 Multi-Axis DOAS (MAX-DOAS), 26 NDACC Zenith-Scattered-Light DOAS (ZSL-DOAS), and 25 PGN/Pandora instruments distributed globally. The validation methodology gives special care to minimizing mismatch errors due to imperfect spatio-temporal co-location of the satellite and correlative data, e.g., by using tailored observation operators to account for differences in smoothing and in sampling of atmospheric structures and variability, and photochemical modelling to reduce diurnal cycle effects. Compared to the ground-based measurements, S5p data show, on an average: (i) a negative bias for the tropospheric column data, of typically -23 to -37% in clean to slightly polluted conditions, but reaching values as high as -51% over highly polluted areas; (ii) a slight negative bias for the stratospheric column data, of about -0.2 Pmolec/cm², i.e. approx. -2% in summer to -15% in winter; and (iii) a bias ranging from zero to -50% for the total column data, found to depend on the amplitude of the total NO₂ column, with small to slightly positive bias values for columns below 6 Pmolec/cm² and negative values above. The dispersion between S5p and correlative measurements contains mostly random components, which remain within mission requirements for the stratospheric column data (0.5 Pmolec/cm²), but exceed those for the tropospheric column data (0.7 Pmolec/cm²). While a part of the biases and dispersion may be due to representativeness differences [such as different area averaging and measurement times](#), it is known that errors in the S5p tropospheric columns exist due to shortcomings in the (horizontally coarse) a-priori profile representation in the TM5-MP chemistry transport model used in the S5p retrieval, and to a lesser extent, to the treatment of cloud effects [and aerosols](#). Although considerable differences (up to 2 Pmolec/cm² and more) are observed at single ground-pixel level, the near-real-time (NRTI) and off-line (OFFL) versions of the S5p NO₂ operational data processor provide similar NO₂ column values and validation results when globally averaged, with the NRTI values being on average 0.79% larger than the OFFL values.

1 Introduction

Nitrogen oxides, and in particular the NO_x (NO and NO₂), are important trace gases both in the troposphere and the stratosphere. In the troposphere they are produced mainly by the combustion of fossil and other organic fuels, and by the production and use of nitrogen fertilizers for agriculture. They can also have a natural origin, e.g., lightning, biological processes in soils, and biomass burning. The NO/NO₂ ratio varies with solar illumination primarily, from 0.2-0.5 during the day down to zero at night. NO_x are converted to nitric acid and nitrates, which are removed by dry deposition and rain, resulting in a tropospheric lifetime of a few hours to days. Tropospheric NO_x are pollutants as well as proxies for other pollutants resulting from the

(high-temperature) combustion of organic fuels. They are precursors for tropospheric ozone and aerosols and contribute to acid rain and smog. Because of their adverse health effects, local to national regulations ~~to limit~~ limiting boundary layer NO_x concentrations are now in place in a long list of countries across the world. In the stratosphere NO_x are formed by the photolysis of tropospheric nitrous oxide (N₂O) produced by biogenic and anthropogenic processes and going up through the troposphere and stratosphere. Stratospheric NO_x controls the abundance of ozone, as a catalyst in ozone destruction processes, but also by mitigating ozone losses caused by catalytic cycles involving anthropogenic halogens through the lock-up of these halogens in so-called long-lived reservoirs.

The global distribution, cycles and trends of atmospheric NO₂ have been measured from space by a large number of instruments on low-Earth orbit (LEO) satellites. Since the late 1970s, its stratospheric and sometimes mesospheric abundance has been measured by limb viewing and solar occultation instruments working in the UV-visible and infrared spectral ranges: SME, LIMS, SAGE(-II), HALOE, POAM-2/3... and, in the last decade, OSIRIS, GOMOS, MIPAS, SCIAMACHY, Scisat ACE, and SAGE-III. Follow-on missions combining limb and occultation measurements are in development, like ALTIUS planned for the coming years. Pioneered in 1995 with ERS-2 GOME (Burrows et al., 1999), which for the first time brought into space NO₂ column measurements by Differential Optical Absorption Spectroscopy (DOAS, Noxon et al. (1979); Platt and Perner (1983)), the global monitoring of tropospheric NO₂ has continued uninterrupted with a suite of UV-visible DOAS instruments with improving sensitivity and horizontal resolution: Envisat SCIAMACHY (Bovensmann et al., 1999), EOS-Aura OMI (Levelt et al., 2018), and the series of MetOp-A/B/C GOME-2 (Valks et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2019b).

Owing to its cardinal role in air quality, tropospheric chemistry, stratospheric ozone, and as a precursor of essential climate variables (ECV), the monitoring of atmospheric NO₂ on ~~the a~~ the a global scale has been given proper attention in the European Earth Observation programme Copernicus. The Copernicus Space Component (CSC) develops a constellation of atmospheric composition Sentinel satellites with complementary NO₂ measurement capabilities, consisting of Sentinel-4 geostationary missions (with hourly monitoring over Europe) and Sentinel-5 LEO missions (with daily monitoring globally) to be launched from 2023 ~~on-wardsonwards~~. A NO₂ measurement channel is also planned for the Copernicus Carbon Dioxide Monitoring mission CO2M for better attribution of the atmospheric emissions. First element in orbit of this LEO+GEO constellation, the TROPospheric Monitoring Instrument (TROPOMI) was launched on board of ESA's Sentinel-5 Precursor (S5p) early-afternoon LEO satellite in October 2017. This hyperspectral imaging spectrometer measures the Earth radiance, at 0.2-0.4 nm resolution in the visible absorption band of NO₂, over ground pixels as small as $7.0 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$ or $5.5 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$ (before and after the switch to smaller pixel size on August 6, 2019, respectively) with an almost daily global coverage thanks to a swath width of 2600 km.

Pre-launch mission requirements for the Copernicus Sentinel NO₂ data are, for the tropospheric NO₂ column, a bias lower than 50% and an uncertainty lower than 0.7 Pmolec/cm², and for the stratospheric NO₂ column, a bias lower than 10% and an uncertainty lower than 0.5 Pmolec/cm² (ESA, 2017a, b). Since the beginning of its nominal operation in April 2018, in-flight compliance of S5p TROPOMI with these mission requirements has been monitored routinely by means of comparisons to ground-based reference measurements in the Validation Data Analysis Facility (VDAF) of the S5p Mission Performance Centre (MPC) and by confrontation with similar satellite data from OMI and GOME-2. The Copernicus S5p MPC routine

operations validation service is complemented with ground-based validation studies carried out in the framework of ESA's
65 S5P Validation Team (S5PVT) through research projects funded nationally like NIDFORVAL (see details in the Acknowledgments section). Ground-based validation of satellite NO₂ data (e.g., Petritoli et al., 2003; Brinksma et al., 2008; Celarier et al., 2008; Ionov et al., 2008; Valks et al., 2011; Compernelle et al., 2020b; Pinardi et al., 2020) relies classically on three types of UV-visible DOAS instruments which, thanks to complementary measurement techniques, provide all together correlative observations sensitive to the three components of the S5p data product: Multi-Axis Differential Optical Absorption
70 Spectroscopy (MAX-DOAS) measures the tropospheric column during the day, Zenith-Scattered-Light DOAS (ZSL-DOAS) the stratospheric column at dawn and dusk, and Pandora direct Sun instruments the total column during the day, respectively. Currently, those three types of instruments contribute to global monitoring networks. Fig. 1 shows the geographical distribution of instruments contributing data to the reported S5p validation study.

In this paper, we report on the consolidated results of the S5p NO₂ ground-based validation activities for the first two
75 years of nominal operation. The TROPOMI tropospheric, stratospheric and total column data products under investigation are described in Sect. 2, with a brief assessment of the coherence between the data generated by the near-real-time (NRTI) and off-line (OFFL) channels of the operational processors. For clarity, we present in separate sections results for the stratospheric (Sect. 3), tropospheric (Sect. 4) and total (Sect. 5) NO₂ columns. These three sections include the description of the S5p data preparation, of the ground-based validation data, of the preparation of the filtered, co-located, and harmonized data pairs to be
80 compared, and the comparison results. Robust, harmonised statistical estimators are derived from the comparisons consistently throughout the paper: the median difference as a proxy for the bias, and half of the 68% interpercentile (IP68/2) as a measure of the comparison spread (equivalent to a standard deviation for a Normal distribution, but much less sensitive to unavoidable outliers). Thereafter, in Sect. 6, these individual results are assembled and discussed all together, to derive conclusions on their mutual coherence, on the fitness-for-purpose of the S5p data, and on remaining challenges for the accurate validation of NO₂
85 observations from space.

2 S5p TROPOMI data

2.1 Data description and filtering

The retrieval of NO₂ (sub)columns from TROPOMI Earth nadir radiance and solar irradiance spectra is a 3-step process relying on DOAS and on a Chemical Transport Model (CTM) based stratosphere-troposphere separation. The TROPOMI NO₂ algo-
90 rithm is an adaptation of the QA4ECV community retrieval approach (Boersma et al. (2018)) and of the DOMINO/TEMIS algorithm (Boersma et al., 2007, 2011), already applied successfully to heritage and current satellite data records (GOME, SCIAMACHY, OMI, GOME-2). In the first step, the integrated amount of NO₂ along the optical path, or slant column density (SCD), is derived using the classical DOAS approach (Platt and Perner, 1983). In the second step, the retrieved SCD is assimilated by the TM5-MP CTM to allocate a vertical profile of the NO₂ concentration, needed for the separation between
95 stratospheric and tropospheric SCDs. This assimilation procedure favours observations over pristine, remote areas where the entire NO₂ SCD can be attributed to the stratospheric component. Assuming relatively slow changes in the stratospheric NO_x

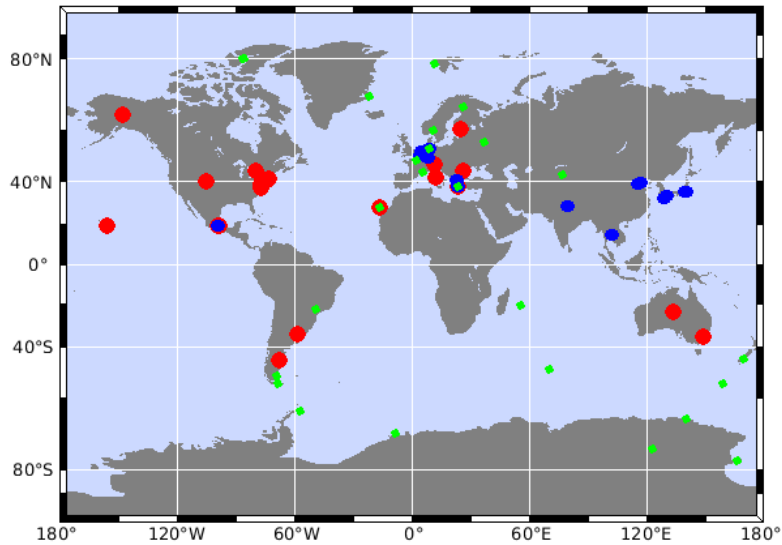


Figure 1. Geographical distribution of the UV-visible DOAS spectrometers contributing the ground-based correlative measurements: 26 NDACC ZSL-DOAS instruments in green, 19 MAX-DOAS instruments in blue, and 25 PGN instruments in red.

field, the model transports information to areas with a more significant tropospheric component. In the third step, the three slant (sub)column densities are converted into vertical (sub)column densities using appropriate Air Mass Factors (AMFs). The CTM can be run either in forecast mode, using 1-day forecast meteorological data from the European Centre for Medium-range
 100 Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), or in a more delayed processing mode, using 0-12hour forecast meteorological data. The former is used for near-real-time (NRTI) processing of the TROPOMI measurements, the latter for the offline (OFFL) production. For full technical details, the reader is referred to the Product Readme File (PRF), Product User Manual (PUM) and Algorithm Theoretical Basis Document (ATBD), all available at <http://www.tropomi.eu/data-products/nitrogen-dioxide>. A detailed description and quality assessment of the derived slant column data is already published by van Geffen et al. (2020), and a
 105 publication on satellite inter-comparison of vertical column data is under preparation (Eskes et al., 2020). The current paper addresses the independent ground-based validation of vertical sub-column densities in the troposphere and stratosphere and of the vertical total column. The S5p data set validated here covers the nominal operational phase (Phase E2) of the S5p mission, starting in April 2018 and up to February 2020. No data obtained during the commissioning phase of the satellite have been used. Table 1 provides an overview of the processor versions ~~this corresponds to~~ to which this corresponds. They constitute as
 110 continuous a data set as possible from May (NRTI) or October (OFFL) 2018 onward. Combining RPRO (May-October 2018) with OFFL, a coherent dataset with version OFFL processor v01.02.02 or higher can be obtained.

Table 1. Identification of the S5p NO₂ data versions validated here: near-real-time channel (NRTI), off-line channel (OFFL) and interim reprocessing (RPRO). Major updates were those leading to v01.02.00 and to v01.03.00.

Processor version	start orbit	start date	end orbit	end date
NRTI				
01.00.01	2955	2018-05-09	3364	2018-06-07
01.00.02	3745	2018-07-04	3946	2018-07-18
01.01.00	3947	2018-07-18	5333	2018-07-24
01.02.00	5336	2018-10-24	5929	2018-12-05
01.02.02	5931	2018-12-05	7517	2019-03-27
01.03.00	7519	2019-03-27	7999	2019-03-30
01.03.01	7999	2019-03-30	9158	2019-07-20
01.03.02	9159	2019-07-20	current version	
OFFL				
01.02.00	5236	2018-10-17	5832	2018-11-28
01.02.02	5840	2018-11-29	7424	2019-03-20
01.03.00	7425	2019-03-20	7906	2019-04-23
01.03.01	7907	2019-04-23	8814	2019-06-26
01.03.02	8815	2019-06-26	current version	
RPRO				
01.02.02	2836	2018-05-01	5235	2018-10-17

Besides very detailed quality flags, the S5p NO₂ data product includes a combined quality assurance value (qa_value) enabling end users to easily filter data for their own purpose. For tropospheric applications (when not using the averaging kernels), the guideline is to use only NO₂ data with a qa_value > 0.75. This removes very cloudy scenes (cloud radiance fraction > 0.5), snow- or ice-covered scenes, and problematic retrievals. For stratospheric applications, where clouds are less of an issue, a more relaxed threshold of qa_value > 0.5 is recommended. These data filtering recommendations have been applied here, where the stricter requirement of qa_value > 0.75 has been used for the total column validation as well. Again, further details on this can be found in the PRF, PUM, and ATBD.

2.2 Mutual coherence between NRTI and OFFL

As described in Sect. 2.1, the main difference between the NRTI and OFFL data processors lies in the use of either forecast or analysis ECMWF meteorological data as input, and consequently the use of either forecast or analysis TM5-MP vertical NO₂ profiles. The mutual consistency between the NRTI and OFFL data products is monitored routinely using data and tools provided by the S5p MPC Level-2 Quality Control Portal (<https://mpc-l2.tropomi.eu>). Fig. 2 shows that, looking at global means of the NO₂ total column, the NRTI and OFFL data look very much alike, with NRTI column values on an average

125 0.79% larger than those obtained in OFFL. Eight NRTI and six OFFL processor versions are used in this comparison (as identified in Table 1). The activation of the successive processor versions and the switch to the smaller ground pixel size (on August 6, 2019) are marked by the yellow vertical lines. As expected both NRTI and OFFL channels show NO₂ maxima in the winter/summer seasons (December, June) and minima near the equinoxes. The scatter also exhibits a seasonal cycle, with largest values observed in the Northern Hemisphere winter season.

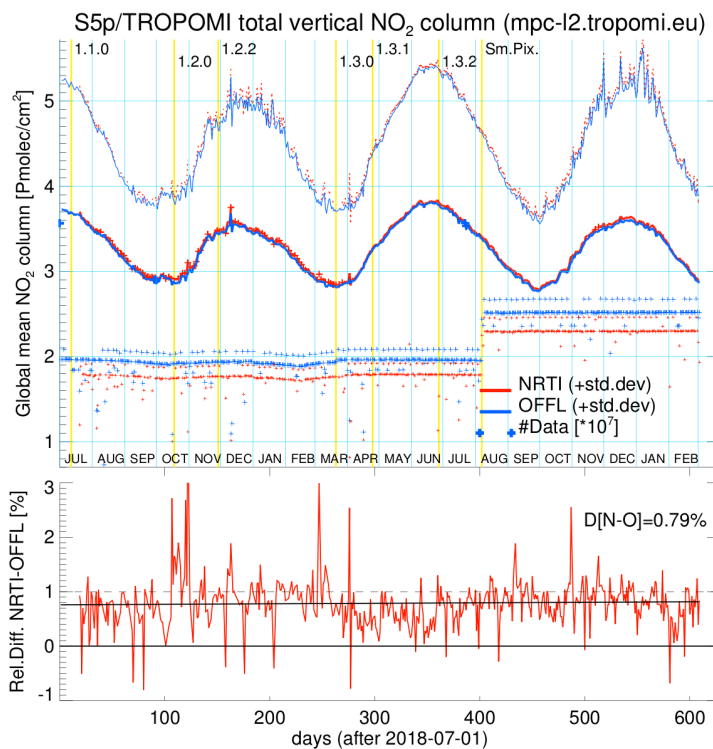


Figure 2. *Upper panel:* Time series of the global means of NO₂ total column data retrieved with the NRTI (red line) and OFFL (blue line) processors, and their standard deviation, in Pmolec/cm², from July 2018 till February 2020. Crosses depict the number of measurements divided by 10⁷, with the same colour code: red for NRTI, blue for OFFL. Yellow vertical lines indicate the transition dates for processor upgrades and the switch to the smaller ground pixel size. *Lower panel:* Percent relative difference between NRTI and OFFL global means of total NO₂ values. The Theil-Sen linear regression line (black) is superimposed.

130 To further assess similarities and differences between the NRTI and OFFL processing channels, NO₂ values along individual orbits are also compared directly. An illustration is given in Figure 3 for S5p orbit #07407, a randomly selected orbit crossing Western Europe on a relatively cloud-free day (March 19, 2019).

The three maps of Figure 3 show the difference between NRTI and OFFL values for the total, stratospheric and tropospheric NO₂ column, respectively, together with the corresponding Pearson correlation coefficient and root-mean-square deviation (RMSD). While the correlation coefficient is high (typically around 0.97), the maps do reveal regions where significant de-

135

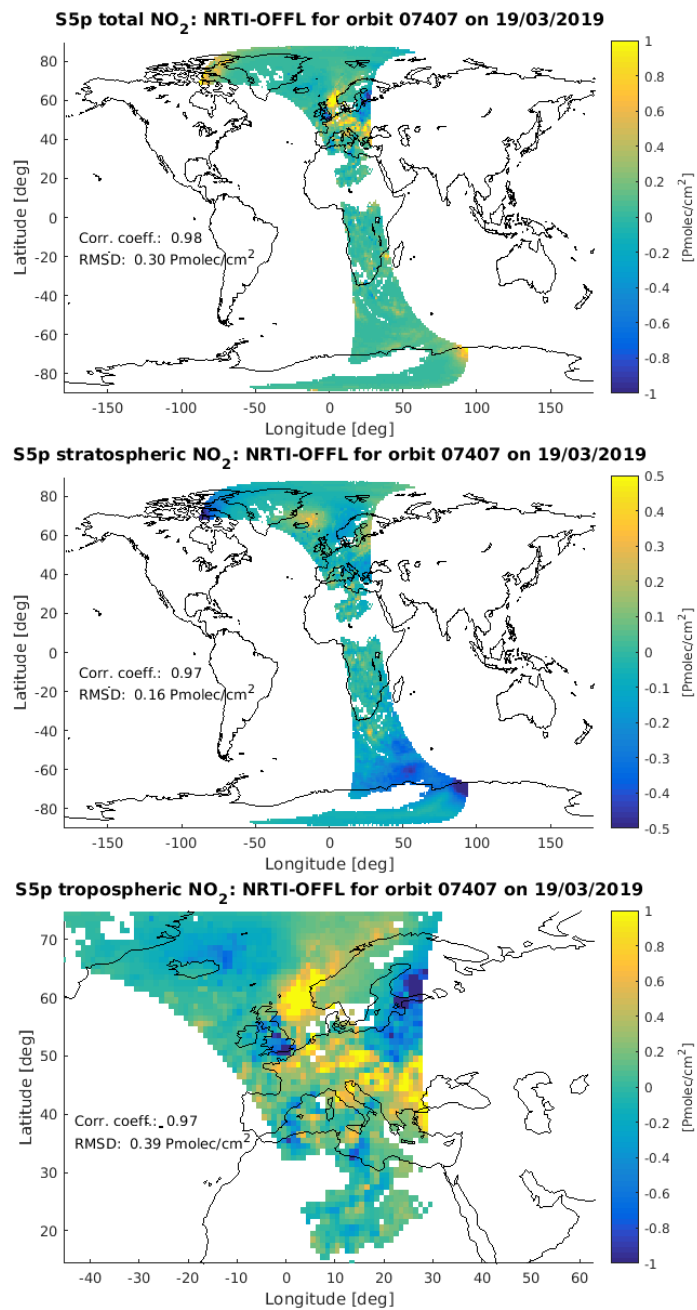


Figure 3. Maps of the difference between the NRTI and OFFL NO₂ data values for S5p orbit #07407 on March 19, 2019. *Upper panel:* difference between total column values; *Middle panel:* stratospheric columns; *Lower panel:* zoom on the difference in tropospheric column values over Western Europe.

140 viations occur, up to ± 0.5 Pmolec/cm² between the NRTI and OFFL stratospheric columns, and up to ± 2 Pmolec/cm² for both the tropospheric columns and the total columns. Significant differences over South-East England (London) and in the Manchester-Liverpool area are particularly striking. North-East of Iceland, NRTI-OFFL differences in stratospheric and in tropospheric columns are of opposite sign, indicating a different stratosphere/troposphere separation after the slant column retrieval leading to little difference in the total columns. A more detailed investigation targeted solely at regions and times of significant deviations between NRTI and OFFL would be needed to better reveal the full benefit of the OFFL analysis, but that is beyond the scope of the current paper. What needs to be underlined is that the ground-based validation studies on which the present consolidated results are based upon, do not yield significantly different conclusions for the two processing modes. Therefore, all results reported in this paper may be considered as applicable to the two processing channels.

145 3 Stratospheric column validation

3.1 NDACC Zenith-sky DOAS data

Since the pioneering ages of NO₂ column measurements from space with ERS-2 GOME in the mid-1990s, ground-based UV-visible DOAS measurements at twilight have served as a reference for the validation of NO₂ total column data over unpolluted stations and of NO₂ stratospheric column data from all nadir UV-visible satellites to date (e.g., Lambert et al., 1997a, b; Petritoli et al., 2003; Celarier et al., 2008; Ionov et al., 2008; Gruzdev and Elokhov, 2010; Dirksen et al., 2011; Hendrick et al., 2011; Robles-Gonzalez et al., 2016). Here as well, S5p TROPOMI stratospheric NO₂ column data are compared to the correlative measurements acquired by ZSL-DOAS (Zenith-Scattered Light Differential Optical Absorption Spectroscopy) UV-Visible spectrometers (e.g. Solomon et al., 1987; Hendrick et al., 2011, and references therein). A key property of zenith-sky measurements at twilight is the geometrical enhancement of the optical path in the stratosphere (Solomon et al., 1987), which offers high sensitivity to stratospheric absorbers of visible radiation and lower sensitivity to clouds and tropospheric species (except in the case of strong pollution events during thunderstorms or thick haze, see e.g. Pfeilsticker et al. (1999)). However, the geometrical enhancement also implies horizontal smoothing of the measured information over hundreds of kilometres, which requires appropriate co-location methods to avoid large discrepancies with the higher-resolution measurements of TROPOMI, as discussed in Sect. 3.2. Various ZSL-DOAS UV-visible instruments with standard operating procedures and harmonized retrieval methods perform network operation in the framework of the Network for the Detection of Atmospheric Composition Change (NDACC, De Mazière et al. (2018)). Part of this, over 15 instruments of the SAOZ design (Système d'Analyse par Observation Zénitale) are distributed worldwide and provide data in near-real-time through the CNRS LATMOS_RT Facility (Pommereau and Goutail, 1988). For the current work, ZSL-DOAS validation data have been obtained: (1) through the LATMOS_RT Facility (in near-real-time processing mode), (2) from the NDACC Data Host Facility (DHF), and (3) via private communication with the instrument operator. The geographical distribution of these instruments is shown in Fig. 1 and further details are provided in A1 in the supplement. Measurements are made during twilight, at sunrise and sunset, but only sunset measurements are used here for signal-to-noise reasons (larger NO₂ column) and as these happen closer in time to the early-afternoon overpass of S5p. NDACC intercomparison campaigns (Roscoe et al., 1999; Vandaele et al., 2005) con-

clude to an uncertainty of about 4-7% on the slant column density. After conversion of the slant column into a vertical column
170 using a zenith-sky AMF, and for the latest version of the data processing, the uncertainty on the vertical column is estimated
to be the order of 10-14% (Yela et al., 2017; Bognar et al., 2019). A limiting factor comes from the temperature dependence
of the NO₂ absorption cross-sections used in the DOAS retrieval of the slant column density. Most of the NDACC instruments
use cross-sections at a single temperature (220 K), which introduces a seasonal error of up to a few percent at middle and high
latitudes.

175 3.2 Co-location and harmonization

To account for effects of the photochemical diurnal cycle of stratospheric NO₂, the ZSL-DOAS measurements at sunset
are adjusted to the early-afternoon S5p overpass time using a model-based correction factor. The latter is calculated
with the PSCBOX 1D stacked-box photochemical model (Errera and Fonteyn, 2001; Hendrick et al., 2004) initiated by
daily fields from the SLIMCAT chemistry-transport model (CTM). The amplitude of the adjustment factor is sensitive
180 to the effective SZA assigned to the ZSL-DOAS measurements. It is assumed here to be 89.5° or, during polar day
and close to polar night, the largest or smallest SZA reached, respectively. The uncertainty related to this adjustment is
estimated to be of the order of 10%, the main source of uncertainty probably being the effective SZA to assign to the
full twilight measurement period. To reduce mismatch errors due to the significant difference in horizontal sensitivity
between S5p and ZSL-DOAS measurements, individual TROPOMI NO₂ stratospheric column data (in ground pixels
185 at high horizontal sampling) are averaged over the much larger footprint of the air mass to which the ground-based
zenith-sky measurement is sensitive, see [Lambert et al. \(1997b, ISBN 978-1-4614-3908-0, © Springer New York, 2012\)](#) and
[Verhoelst et al. \(2015\)](#) [Lambert et al. \(1997b, ISBN 978-1-4614-3908-0, © Springer New York, 2012\)](#); [Verhoelst et al. \(2015\)](#) and
[Compernelle et al. \(2020b\)](#) for details. The length of this footprint is of the order of 300-600 km in the direction of the sun,
and the width is typically of the order of 50-100 km at mid latitudes, depending on the duration of sunrise and sunset. Note
190 that, as the TROPOMI stratospheric column is a TM5 output, it's true resolution is actually much lower than the pixel size.

3.3 Comparison results

Fig. 4 illustrates the comparison between TROPOMI and ground-based ZSL-DOAS SAOZ NO₂ data at the NDACC station at
Observatoire de Haute Provence (O.H.P.) in Southern France. The time series reveal a small negative [bias-median difference](#) for
TROPOMI, which is found to be a common feature across the network, but little seasonal structure. The correlation coefficient
195 is excellent and the histogram of the differences has an almost Gaussian shape.

Comparison results for the entire ZSL-DOAS network are presented in Fig. 5. This figure reveals occasionally larger differ-
ences in more difficult co-location conditions (e.g. enhanced variability at the border of the polar vortex) but no impact of the
TROPOMI pixel size change on August 6th, 2019. The latter result must be interpreted with care as, for these comparisons,
multiple TROPOMI pixels are averaged over the ZSL-DOAS observation operator before comparison (see Sect. 3.2), and as
200 such any change in the noise statistics of individual pixels will be hidden.

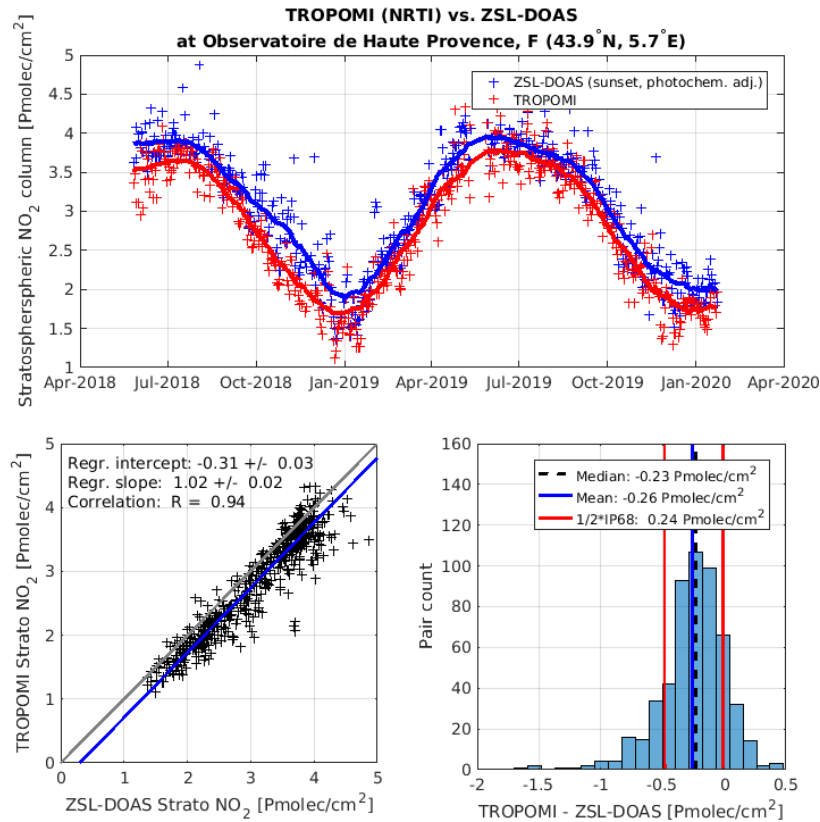


Figure 4. *Upper panel:* Time series of S5p NRTI stratospheric NO₂ column data co-located with ground-based SAOZ sunset measurements performed by CNRS/LATMOS at the NDACC mid-latitude station of Observatoire de Haute-Provence (France). The latter were adjusted for the photochemical difference between the S5p and twilight solar local times, while S5p data were averaged over the ground-based twilight air mass. Solid lines represent 2-month running medians. *Lower panels:* Scatter plot (left-hand side) and histogram of the difference (right-hand side) with several statistical measures of the agreement between data.

Statistical estimators of the bias (median difference) and scatter per station are presented in box-whisker plots in Fig. 6, and in tabular form in A1. Across the network, S5p NRTI and OFFL stratospheric NO₂ column data are generally lower than the ground-based values by approximately 0.2 Pmolec/cm², with a station-to-station scatter of this bias-median difference of similar magnitude (0.3 Pmolec/cm²). These numbers are within the mission requirement of a maximum bias of 10% (equivalent to 0.2-0.4 Pmolec/cm², depending on latitude and season), and within the combined systemic uncertainty of the reference data and their model-based photochemical adjustment. The IP68/2 dispersion of the difference between TROPOMI stratospheric column and correlative data around their median value rarely exceeds 0.3 Pmolec/cm² at sites without tropospheric pollution. When combining random errors in the satellite and reference measurements with irreducible co-location mismatch effects, it

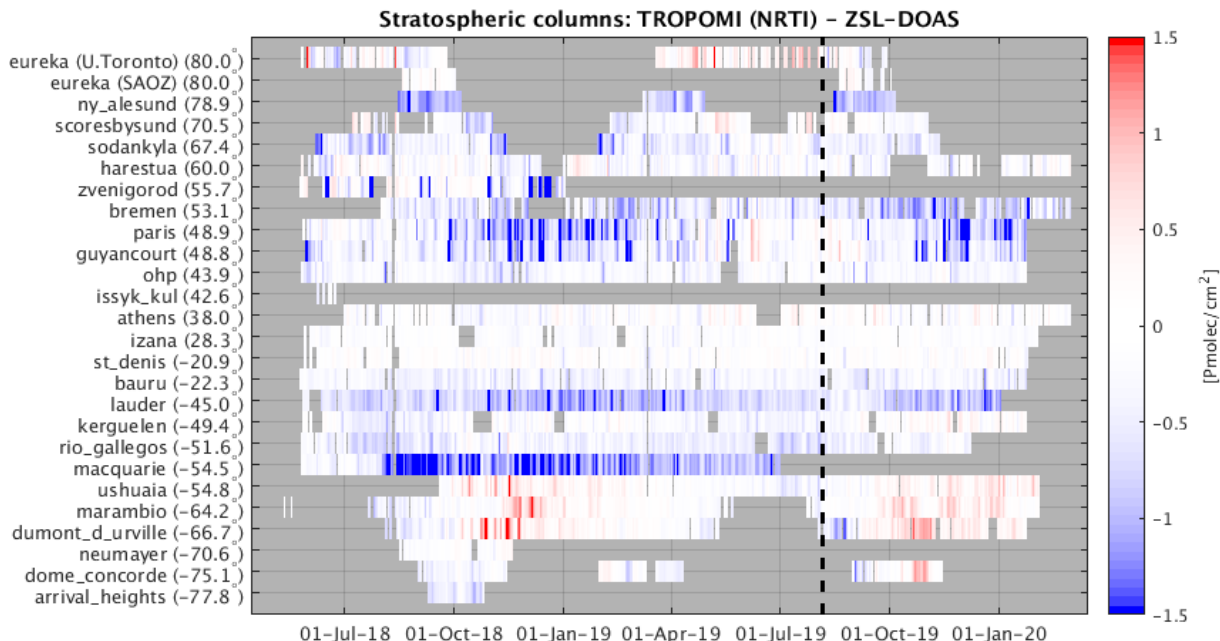


Figure 5. Difference between the S5p TROPOMI and NDACC ZSL-DOAS NO₂ stratospheric column data as a function of time, after photo-chemical adjustment of the ZSL-DOAS sunset data to the S5p SZA. Stations are ordered by increasing latitude (South at the bottom). The dashed vertical line on August 6, 2019, represents the reduction in S5p ground pixel size from $7.0 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$ to $5.5 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$.

can be concluded that the random uncertainty on the S5p stratospheric column measurements falls within mission requirements
 210 of max. 0.5 Pmolec/cm^2 uncertainty.

The potential dependence of the TROPOMI stratospheric column bias and uncertainty on several influence quantities has been evaluated. Fig. ??7 shows results for the solar zenith angle (SZA), the fractional cloud cover (CF), and the surface albedo of the TROPOMI measurement. This evaluation does not reveal any variation of the bias much larger than 0.4 Pmolec/cm^2 over the range of those influence quantities.

215 3.4 PGN measurements at high-altitude stations

Three of the PGN direct-sun instruments (see Sect.5) are located near the summit of a volcanic peak: Alzomoni (3985m a.m.s.l.) in the State of Mexico, Izaña (2360m a.m.s.l.) on Mount Teide on the island of Tenerife, and Mauna Loa (4169m a.m.s.l.) on the island of Hawaii. At these high-altitude sites the total column measured by the ground-based direct-sun instrument misses most of the tropospheric (potentially polluted) part and as such becomes representative of the TROPOMI
 220 stratospheric column. These sites have therefore been added to Fig. 6, illustrating that these comparisons based on direct-sun

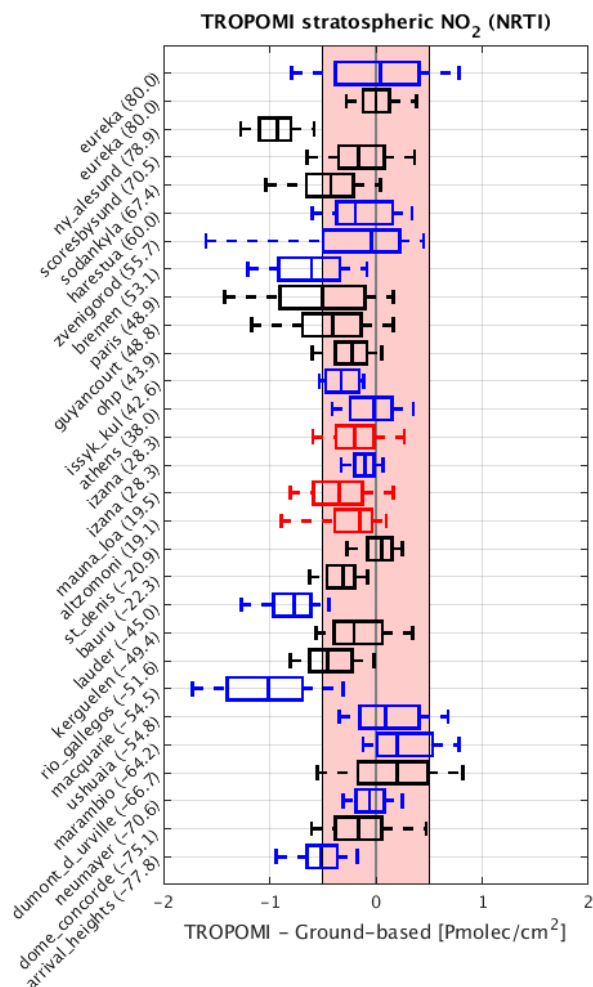


Figure 6. Box-and-whisker plots summarizing from pole to pole the bias and spread of the difference between S5p TROPOMI NRTI and NDACC ZSL-DOAS NO₂ stratospheric columns (SAOZ data in black, other ZSL-DOAS in blue, and PGN in red). The median difference is represented by a vertical solid line inside the box, which marks the 25 and 75% quantiles. The whiskers cover the 9-91% range of the differences. The shaded area represents the mission requirement of 0.5 Pmolec/cm² for the uncertainty. Values between brackets in the labels denote the latitude of the station.

data yield similar conclusions as those based on zenith-sky data, that is, a minor negative median difference of the order of -0.2 Pmolec/cm². It must be noted that the PGN data are processed using cross sections at a single temperature, representative for the troposphere (254 K). This leads to columns which are about 10% larger than if they had been processed with cross sections for 220 K. Future processing of the PGN data will address this, and it is expected that this will mostly remove the

225 apparent negative bias for TROPOMI (but lead to a slight inconsistency with the ZSL-DOAS results).

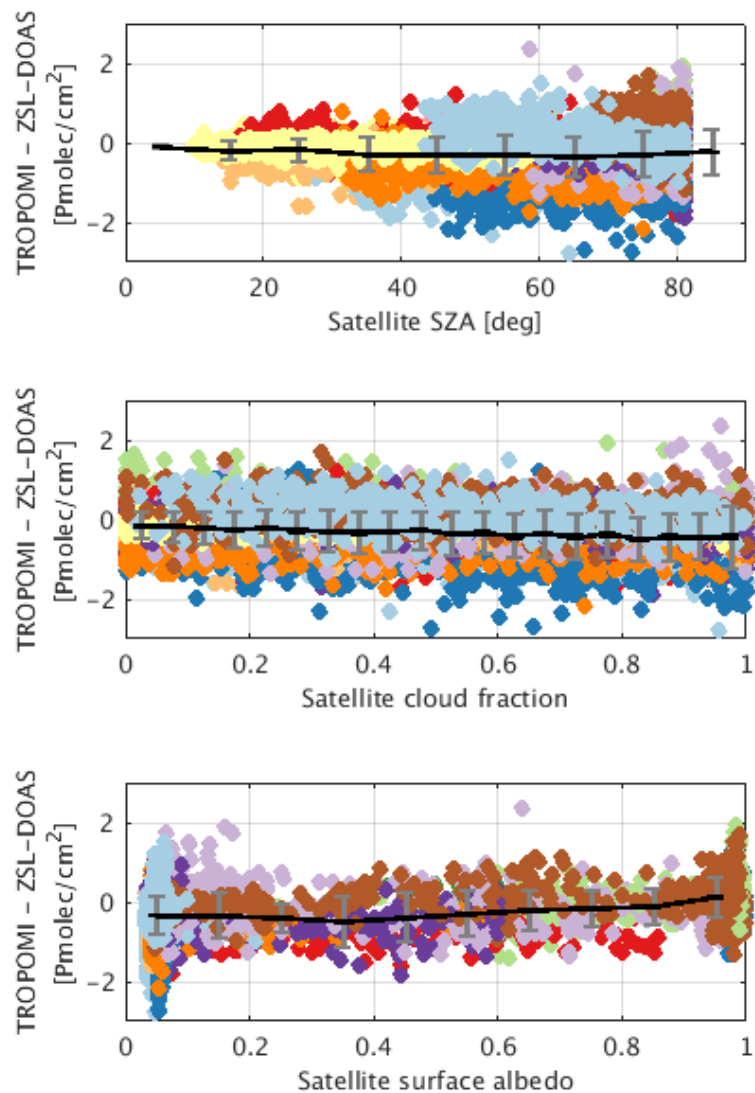


Figure 7. Dependence of the difference between TROPOMI [OFFL-NRTI](#) and ground-based ZSL-DOAS stratospheric NO₂ column data on the satellite solar zenith angle (SAZ), satellite cloud fraction, and satellite surface albedo, including a median and IP68/2 spread per bin (bin widths of 10 degrees in SAZ, 0.1 ± 0.05 in CF, and 0.1 in surface albedo). [Different colours represent different stations, to illustrate the \(modest\) impact of station-to-station network in-homogeneity on these analyses.](#)

4 Tropospheric column validation

4.1 MAX-DOAS data

Satellite tropospheric NO₂ column data are compared classically to correlative measurements acquired by MultiAxis-Differential Optical Absorption Spectroscopy (MAX-DOAS) instruments (Hönninger and Platt, 2002; Honninger et al., 2004;

230 Sinreich et al., 2005). MAX-DOAS instruments measure from sunrise to sunset the UV-visible radiance scattered in several directions and elevation angles, from which the tropospheric VCD and/or the lowest part of the tropospheric NO₂ profile (usually up to 3km altitude, and up to 10km at best) can be retrieved through different techniques (see e.g. Clémer et al., 2010; Hendrick et al., 2014; Friedrich et al., 2019; Bösch et al., 2018; Irie et al., 2008, 2011; Vlemmix et al., 2010; Wagner et al., 2011; Beirle et al., 2019), with between 1 and 3 degrees of freedom. Their horizontal spatial representativeness varies with the aerosol load and the spectral region of the retrieval, from a few km to tens of km (Irie et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014). The Published total uncertainty estimates on the NO₂ tropospheric VCD are of the order of 7-17% in polluted conditions, including both random (around 3 to 10% depending on the instrument) and systematic (11 to 14%) contributions (Irie et al., 2008; Wagner et al., 2011; Hendrick et al., 2014; Kanaya et al., 2014). (Irie et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2011; Hendrick et al., 2014; Kanaya et al., 2014). These ranges are more or less confirmed by the uncertainties reported in the data files, as visualized in Fig. A1 in the supplement. Nevertheless, differences in the reported uncertainties and in the actual measurement of the same scene between individual instruments are sometimes larger and the main potential sources of these inhomogeneities are summarized below:

- 245 – Different uncertainty reporting strategy: the reported systematic uncertainty may include only that from the NO₂ cross sections (approx. 3%; UNAM, BIRA-IASB, MPIC, AUTH, IUPB) or it may include also a contribution from the VCD retrieval step (up to 14% in JAMSTEC data and 20% in KNMI data) and the aerosol retrieval (Chiba-U Irie et al., 2011).
- Different SCD retrieval: Recommended common DOAS settings are used by all groups in the present study, and when doing so, instrument intercomparison campaigns like CINDI-1 and -2 (Roscoe et al., 2010; Kreher et al., 2020) revealed relative biases between 3 and 10% in DSCD.
- 250 – Different methods to retrieve VCD from DSCD (see also Table A2): Using either (1) vertical profile inversion using optimal estimation (BIRA-IASB, UNAM), (2) profile inversion using (an optimal estimation of) parameterized profile shapes (JAMSTEC and Chiba-U), (3) direct retrieval via the calculation of a tropospheric AMF (QA4ECV datasets), or (4) direct retrieval using a geometrical approximation, can lead to systematic differences in the 5-15% range (Vlemmix et al., 2015; Frieß et al., 2019).
- 255 Consequently, expert judgment on the total uncertainty at the network level yields a conservative estimate of 30% uncertainty in polluted conditions. Ongoing efforts to harmonise MAX-DOAS tropospheric NO₂ data processing, e.g. as part of the ESA FRM4DOAS project, should help minimizing such network inhomogeneities in the near future.

MAX-DOAS data have been used extensively for tropospheric NO₂ satellite validation, for instance for Aura OMI and MetOp GOME-2 (e.g. by Celarier et al., 2008; Irie et al., 2012; Lin et al., 2014; Kanaya et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2017; Drosoglou et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019a; Compennolle et al., 2020b; Pinardi et al., 2020), as well as for the evaluation of modelling results (Vlemmix et al., 2015; Blechschmidt et al., 2020).

Data are collected either through ESA's Atmospheric Validation Data Centre (EVDC, <https://evdc.esa.int/>) or by direct delivery from the instrument Principal Investigators (e.g. within the S5PVT NIDFORVAL AO project). Currently, 19 MAX-DOAS

stations have contributed correlative data in the TROPOMI measurement period from April 2018 to February 2020. Detailed information about the stations and instruments is provided in A2. A few contributing sites measure in several geometries (e.g., Xianghe measure in both MAX-DOAS and direct sun mode, Bremen and Athens both report MAX-DOAS and zenith-sky measurements) or have multiple instruments (e.g., Cabauw and UNAM stations host both MAX-DOAS and Pandora instruments). This allows detailed (sub)column consistency-checks and in-depth analysis of the site peculiarities, out of the scope of the present overview paper.

270 4.2 Co-location and harmonization

TROPOMI data is filtered following the $qa_value > 0.75$ rule as recommended in the associated PRF (see Sect. 2). Then for each day, the pixel over the site is selected. MAX-DOAS data series are temporally interpolated at the TROPOMI overpass time (only if data within $\pm 1h$ exist) and daily comparisons are performed. This short temporal window avoids the need for a photochemical cycle adjustment. Details on the comparison approach are described in Pinardi et al. (2020) for the validation of OMI and GOME-2 NO_2 column data and in Compernelle et al. (2020b) for the validation of the OMI QA4ECV NO_2 Climate Data Record.

4.3 Comparison results

An illustration of the daily comparisons between TROPOMI and ground-based MAX-DOAS measurements between May 2018 and end of January 2020, is presented in Fig. 8 for the Uccle station (Brussels, B, with moderate pollution levels). The two datasets have a correlation coefficient of 0.75 and a regression slope and intercept of 0.47 and 1.0 $Pmolec/cm^2$ respectively. The (median and mean) difference of about -2.3 to -3.1 $Pmolec/cm^2$ corresponds to a median relative difference of about -30%.

Results for the entire MAX-DOAS network are presented in Fig. 9. This figure reveals mostly (but not only) negative differences with a fairly significant variability but no clear seasonal features. No impact of the TROPOMI ground pixel size change on August 6, 2019, is observed.

285 Box-whisker plots for the whole network are shown in Fig. 10, with corresponding numeric values listed in A2. Based on measurements from these 19 MAX-DOAS stations, three different regimes can be identified:

(i) Small tropospheric NO_2 column values (median values below 2 $Pmolec/cm^2$), e.g. at the Fukue and Phimai stations, lead to small differences. Typically, these stations show a small median bias ($< 0.5 Pmolec/cm^2$), but these can still correspond to up to a -27% relative bias. The dispersion (IP68/2) of the difference is smaller than 1 $Pmolec/cm^2$.

290 (ii) More polluted sites (median tropospheric columns from 3 to 14 $Pmolec/cm^2$) experience a clear negative bias. The median difference ranges between -1 and -5 $Pmolec/cm^2$, i.e. between -15% (Chiba) and -56% (Pantnagar). This underestimation is similar to the one identified in the validation of Aura OMI and MetOp GOME-2 tropospheric NO_2 data by Compernelle et al. (2020b) and Pinardi et al. (2020). The dispersion (IP68/2) of the difference ranges from ~ 2 to $\sim 6 Pmolec/cm^2$, roughly increasing with increasing tropospheric NO_2 median VCD.

295 (iii) Extremely polluted sites report larger differences. This is the case e.g. at the Mexican UNAM sites (UNAM and Vallejo in/close to Mexico city, and Cuautitlan in a more remote part of the state of Mexico), with median tropospheric columns larger

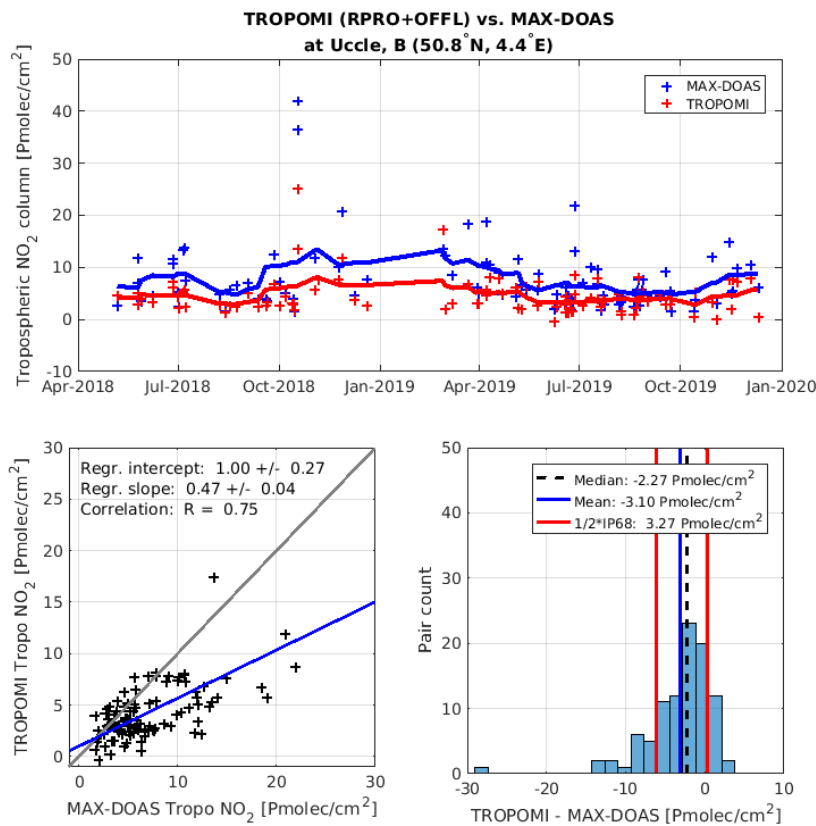


Figure 8. Same as Fig. 4, but now for the S5p OFFL tropospheric NO₂ column data co-located with ground-based MAX-DOAS measurements performed by BIRA-IASB at the NDACC mid-latitude station of Uccle in Brussels (Belgium).

than 15 Pmolec/cm². These stations experience larger differences (>10 Pmolec/cm², i.e., from -37 to -74%). The dispersion (IP68/2) of the difference is also quite large, between 4 and ~12 Pmolec/cm². Results at these sites need deeper analysis.

The overall bias (median of all station median differences) is -2.4 Pmolec/cm², i.e. -37%. The median dispersion is 3.5 Pmolec/cm² while the site-to-site dispersion (IP68/2 over all site medians) is 2.8 Pmolec/cm². Note that these **numbers over-all-sites-network-averaged numbers** are close to the numbers found for the polluted (Athens to Gucheng) sites. These results are within the mission requirement of a maximum bias of 50%, but they exceed the uncertainty requirement of maximum at most 0.7 Pmolec/cm², which is however reached for the clean sites ensemble, which is only satisfied for the clean-sites ensemble. A discussion on the causes of these biases and sometimes large comparisons spread is provided in Sect. 6.

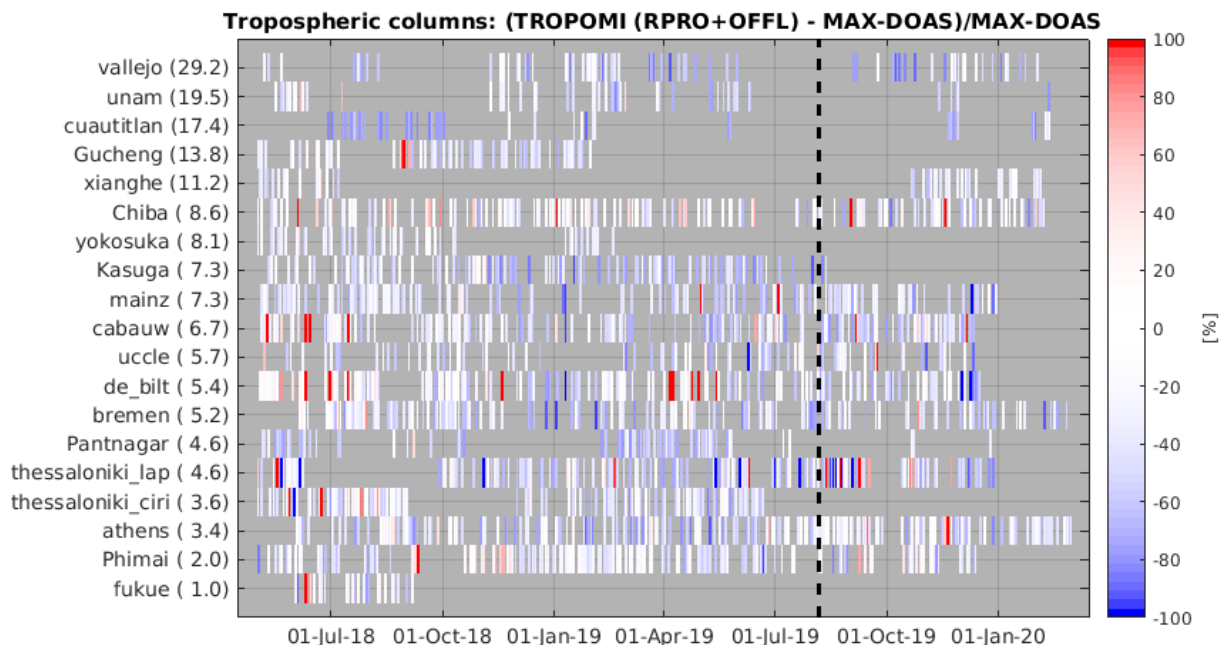


Figure 9. Percent relative difference between the S5p TROPOMI and MAX-DOAS NO₂ tropospheric column data as a function of time. Stations are ordered by median NO₂ tropospheric column (lowest median value at the bottom). The dashed vertical line on August 6, 2019, represents the reduction in S5p ground pixel size from $7.0 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$ to $5.5 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$.

305 5 Total column validation

5.1 PGN/Pandora data

The Pandonia Global Network (PGN) delivers direct-sun total column and multi-axis tropospheric column observations of several trace gases including NO₂ from a network of ground-based standardized Pandora sunphotometers in an automated way. In this work, only direct-sun observations are used. These have a random error uncertainty of about $0.27\text{Pmolec}/\text{cm}^2$ and
 310 a systematic error uncertainty of $2.7\text{Pmolec}/\text{cm}^2$ (Herman et al., 2009). Studies at US and Korean sites during DISCOVER-AQ campaign found a good agreement of Pandora instruments with aircraft in-situ measurements (within 20 percent on average Choi et al., 2019), although larger differences are observed for individual sites (Nowlan et al., 2018).

Pandora data have been used before to validate satellite NO₂ measurements from Aura OMI (Herman et al., 2009; Tzortziou et al., 2014; Kollonige et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2019; Judd et al., 2019; Griffin et al., 2019; Herman et al., 2019; Pinardi et al.,
 315 2020) and TROPOMI (Griffin et al., 2019; Ialongo et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2019).

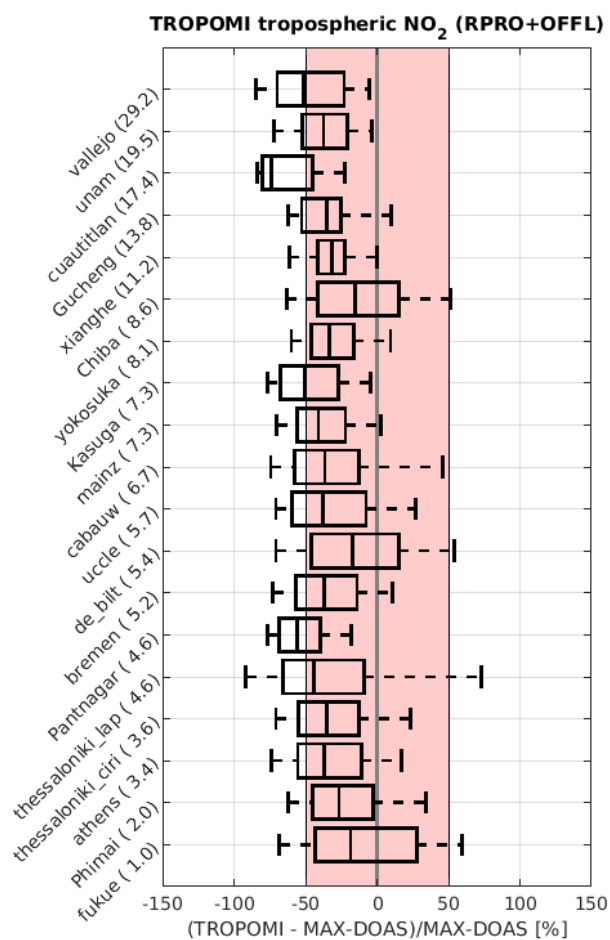


Figure 10. Same as Fig. 6, but now for the difference between S5p TROPOMI OFFL and MAX-DOAS NO₂ tropospheric columns, and with ordered as a function of the median ground-based tropospheric column (largest median VCD values on top). The line represents the median difference. Box bounds represent 25 and 75 percentile, while whiskers indicate the 9 and 91 percentiles. The shaded area corresponds to the mission requirement of maximum 50% for the bias.

For the current work, 25 sites have contributed Pandora data, collected either from the ESA Atmospheric Validation Data Centre (EVDC) (<https://evdc.esa.int/>) or from the PGN data archive (<https://pandonia-global-network.org/>). Only data files from a recent quality upgrade (processor version 1.7, retrieval version nvs1, with file version 004 and 005; see <https://www.pandonia-global-network.org/home/documents/release-notes/>) were used, with 005 files (consolidated data) having precedence

320 over 004 files (rapid delivery data). The most important change with the previous data release is a more stringent quality filtering. Seventeen sites have provided measurement data newer than 3 months.

Except at low sun elevation, the footprint of these direct-sun measurements is much smaller than a TROPOMI pixel. Therefore, - as it is the case with MAX-DOAS - a significant horizontal smoothing difference error can be expected in the TROPOMI-Pandora comparison, especially in the case of tropospheric NO₂ gradients and when tropospheric NO₂ is the largest contributor
325 to the total column.

Three Pandora instruments (Altzomoni, Izaña, Mauna Loa) are located near the summit of a volcanic peak and are therefore not sensitive to the lower-lying tropospheric NO₂. In this work, their observations are compared to the TROPOMI stratospheric NO₂ data (see Sect. 3).

An important caveat must be formulated regarding the cross sections used in the data processing: As the scientific focus of the PGN up until processor version 1.7 (used for this study) was on measuring polluted conditions, i.e. in the presence of moderate to large tropospheric columns, the cross sections used in the processor are scaled to a fixed effective temperature of 254 K, which corresponds to the situation of approximately equal column amounts in the troposphere and stratosphere. As such the results are not entirely suited for observations in clean conditions where the column is dominated by the stratospheric component (typical effective temperature of 220 K). In these background conditions, the PGN columns may be overestimated by up to 10%.
330
335

5.2 Filtering, co-location and harmonization

As was done for the tropospheric column validation in Sect. 4, only S5p pixels with qa_value at least 0.75 are retained. The so-called summed product is used, i.e. the total column computed as the stratospheric plus the tropospheric column values. This summed column differs from the total column product. Only Pandora measurements with the highest quality label (0 and 10)
340 are used. The average column value within a 1-hour time interval, centered on the S5p overpass time, is used. As the NO/NO₂ ratio varies only slowly around the afternoon solar local time of the TROPOMI overpass, this small temporal window ensures no model-based adjustment is required. A 30-minute time interval was tested as well, but this did not change significantly the results. Moreover, only TROPOMI pixels containing the station were considered.

5.3 Comparison results

345 An example of a time series of co-located TROPOMI and PGN total column measurements, and their difference, is shown in Fig. 11.

Results for the entire PGN network are presented in Fig. 12. This figure reveals that the difference, even in relative units, depends strongly on the total NO₂ column, with low (or slightly positive) biases at low columns, and markedly negative biases at high columns. No impact is observed for the TROPOMI ground pixel size switch of August 6, 2019.

350 Statistical estimators of the comparison results across the network are visualized in Fig. 13 and presented in tabular form in A3. One can distinguish roughly two different regimes.

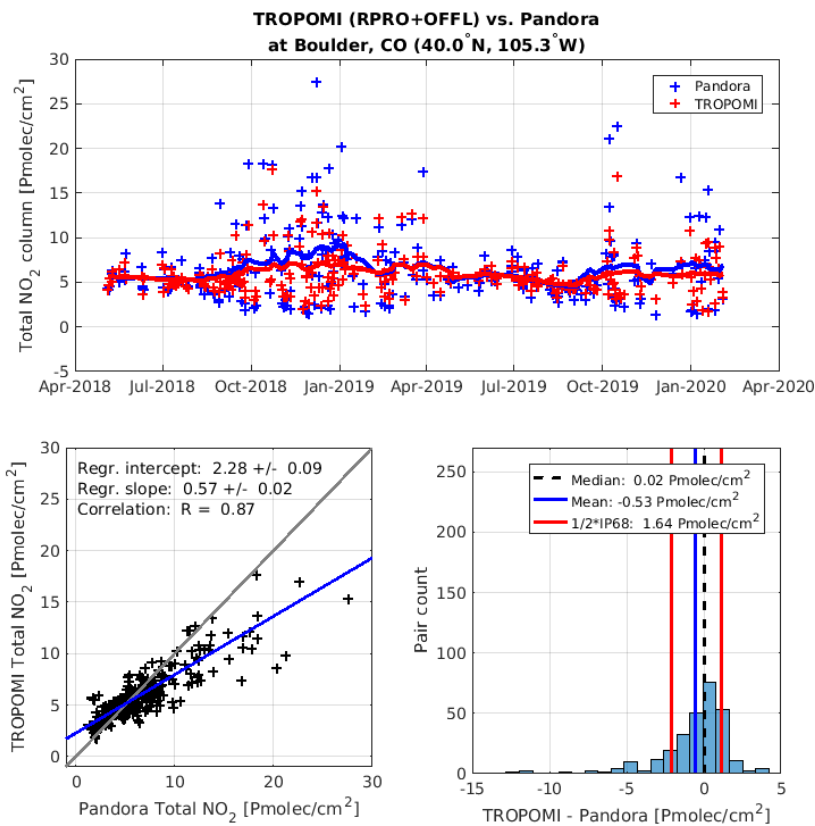


Figure 11. Same as Fig. 4 and Fig. 8, but now for the S5p OFFL total NO₂ column data co-located with ground-based Pandora measurements obtained at the PGN mid-latitude station of Boulder, Colorado.

(i) PGN median total column value between 3 (Alice Springs) and 6 Pmolec/cm² (New Brunswick). The absolute bias (median difference) is within ± 0.2 Pmolec/cm² in most cases (up to +0.5 Pmolec/cm² at Egbert and Helsinki) while the median relative difference is within 5% in most cases (up to $\sim 10\%$ at Alice Springs, Egbert, Inoe and Helsinki). Canberra is a deviating case with larger negative bias (-0.9 Pmolec/cm²; -20%) The difference dispersion (IP68/2) roughly increases with increasing PGN NO₂ median VCD, from 0.4-0.6 Pmolec/cm² at the three cleanest sites, to 1-2 Pmolec/cm² at the other sites.

(ii) PGN NO₂ median total column value between 8 (Buenos Aires) and 19 Pmolec/cm² (UNAM, Mexico city). A negative bias is observed, ranging from -1 Pmolec/cm² (-15%) at The Bronx (New York) to -7 Pmolec/cm² (-50%) at Rome Sapienza. The difference dispersion ranges from ~ 3 (Buenos Aires) to 5 Pmolec/cm² (UNAM).

360 The median relative difference is mostly within (or bordering) the $\pm 10\%$ range for the sites with lower NO₂ median total column values (Alice Springs to New Brunswick; Canberra is an exception), while it is negative and mostly outside this range, but still within $\pm 50\%$, for the sites with higher NO₂ median total column value (Buenos Aires to UNAM).

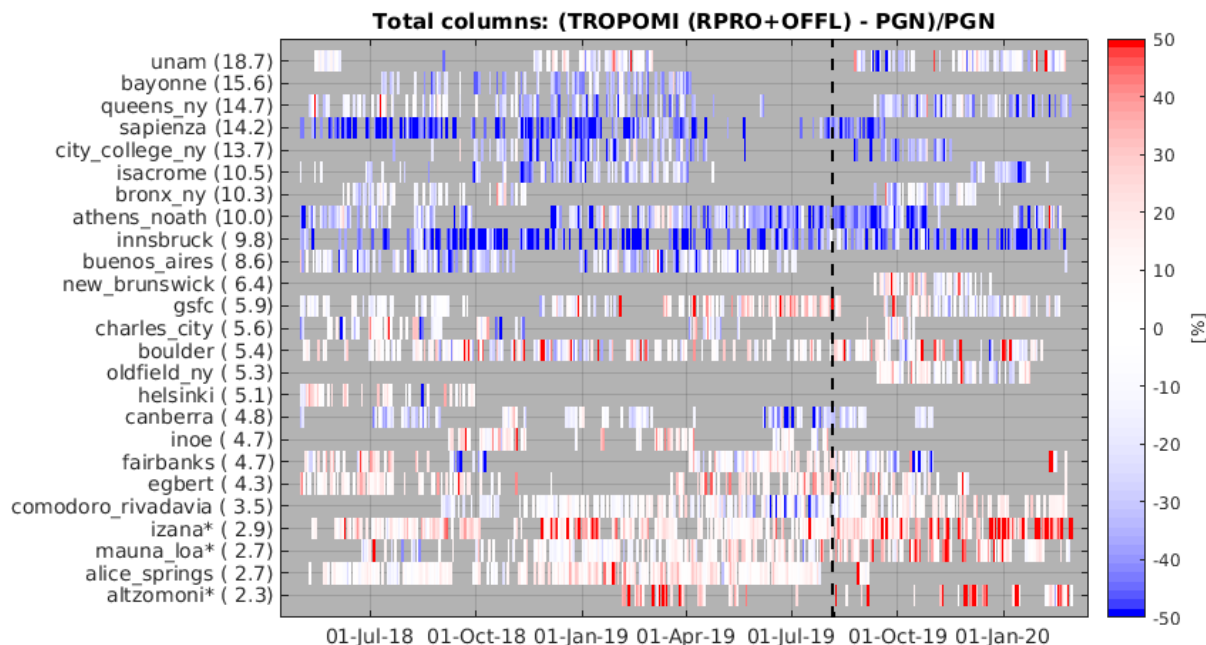


Figure 12. Percent relative difference between the S5p TROPOMI and PGN NO₂ total column data as a function of time. Stations are ordered by median NO₂ total column (lowest median value at the bottom). The dashed vertical line on August 6, 2019, represents the reduction in S5p ground pixel size from $7.0 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$ to $5.5 \times 3.5\text{km}^2$. The three mountain-top sites more suited for the validation of only the stratospheric column are marked with an asterisk.

The overall bias over all sites (median over all site medians or site relative medians) is -0.5 Pmolec/cm^2 (-7%). The overall dispersion is 1.8 Pmolec/cm^2 while the site-to-site dispersion (IP68/2 over all site medians) is 2.2 Pmolec/cm^2 .

365 It is however more useful to make the distinction between sites with low NO₂ (Alice Springs to New Brunswick) and high NO₂ (Buenos Aires to UNAM). For the low NO₂ sites, the overall bias is 0.1 Pmolec/cm^2 (2%), the overall dispersion is 1.1 Pmolec/cm^2 and the site-to-site dispersion is 0.2 Pmolec/cm^2 . For the high NO₂ sites, the overall bias is -3.6 Pmolec/cm^2 (-32%), the overall dispersion is 3.3 Pmolec/cm^2 and the site-to-site dispersion is 1.4 Pmolec/cm^2 .

370 ~~The slight positive bias at clean sites may be related to the small negative bias observed for the stratospheric columns, but in view of the different uncertainty terms in this validation exercise, it is at the moment impossible to test this in-depth.~~

6 Discussion and conclusions

A cross-networks summary of the median difference and dispersion for the three S5p NO₂ (sub)column data is attempted in Table 2. While the difference between the NRTI and OFFL NO₂ values can reach up to a few Pmolec/cm^2 for individual

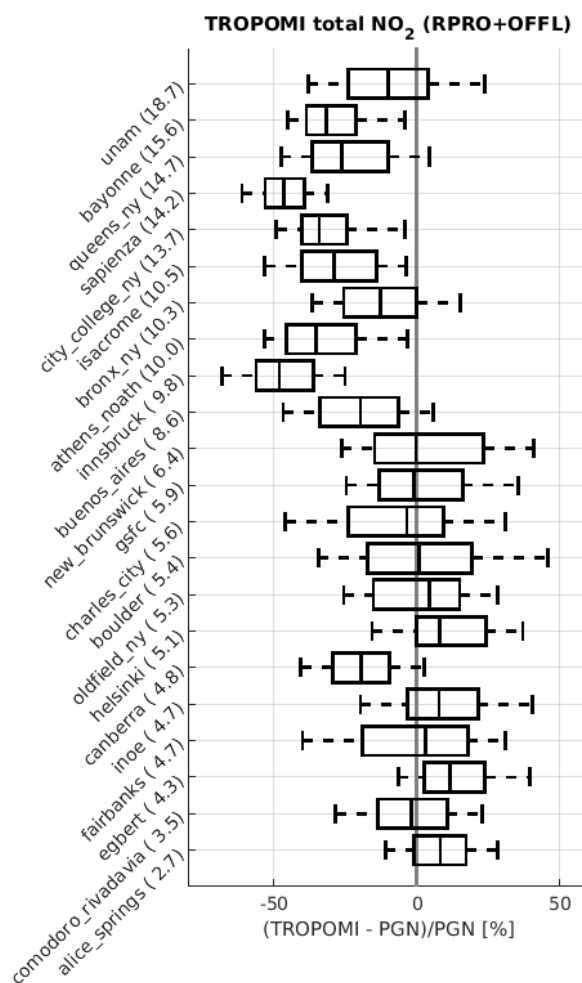


Figure 13. Same as Fig. 6 and Fig. 10, but now for the difference between S5p TROPOMI (RPRO+OFFL) and PGN NO₂ total columns. Stations are ordered by ground-based total NO₂ median value, like in Fig. 10. The median difference is represented by a vertical solid line inside the box, which marks the 25 and 75% quantiles. The whiskers cover the 9-91% range of the differences. The 3 mountain-top PGN instruments used for the validation of the stratospheric columns are not included here, but in Fig. 6.

TROPOMI pixels, the two processing channels do not lead to significantly different validation results, and Table 2 therefore makes no distinction between the two.

For the stratospheric column, the general picture is a slight negative **bias** median difference of TROPOMI with respect to the NDACC ZSL-DOAS network, of the order of -0.2 Pmolec/cm^2 **an**-average, with some station-to-station inhomogeneities and with larger differences in the highly variable conditions of the denoxified polar stratosphere in local winter. This **bias**

Table 2. Cross-networks summary of the validation results: bias (median) and dispersion (IP68/2) of the difference w.r.t the ground-based correlative measurements (median value over the stations).

	Bias	Dispersion
Stratosphere	-0.2 Pmolec cm ⁻² ; -9%	0.3 Pmolec/cm ²
Troposphere		
low NO ₂	-0.3 Pmolec /em²cm⁻² ; -23%	0.7 Pmolec /em²cm⁻²
high NO ₂	-2 Pmolec /em²cm⁻² ; -37%	3.4 Pmolec /em²cm⁻²
extreme NO ₂	-12 Pmolec /em²cm⁻² ; -51%	7 Pmolec /em²cm⁻²
Total column		
low NO ₂	0.1 Pmolec /em²cm⁻² ; 2%	1 Pmolec /em²cm⁻²
high NO ₂	-3.6 Pmolec /em²cm⁻² ; -30%	3 Pmolec /em²cm⁻²

median difference remains within the S5p mission requirements and is similar to the conclusions derived for similar satellite data from other sounders (e.g., Compernelle et al., 2020b). In view of the sources of systematic uncertainties in the different components of the comparison (satellite data, reference data, photochemical cycle adjustment, irreducible mismatch errors), this ~~bias result~~ is entirely within expectations. While comparisons to mountain-top PGN instruments confirms these values, using cross sections at a more appropriate (lower) temperature in the PGN data processing would lead to somewhat smaller columns and therefore a less significant negative median difference than that observed w.r.t. the ZSL-DOAS instruments. This probably reflects the true accuracy of the ground-based data, which should thus be taken to be of the order of ±10% at best.

For the tropospheric and total columns, averaging results over the networks with the hope to obtain a meaningful global estimate is of limited use as the results depend strongly on the amount of tropospheric NO₂. Overall, mission requirements in terms of bias are mostly met, the only exception being the tropospheric columns at extremely polluted sites, which have a bias on the threshold of 50%. Nevertheless, it is clear that large negative median differences are observed across all sites experiencing significant tropospheric pollution. The dispersion of the difference is well outside of the mission requirements formulated for the tropospheric column data. Nevertheless, these results are consistent with those obtained with completely different validation techniques, such as explored by Lorente et al. (2019) over Paris (using ground-based and Eiffel Tower NO₂ concentrations and a climatology of observed column-to-surface ratios). Many factors play a role in this apparent disagreement between TROPOMI and the ground-based networks, that ~~cannot all be attributed~~ can neither be attributed solely to the S5p data, nor to pure area-averaging differences.

First: Local horizontal and vertical variations of the NO₂ field can explain (part of) such discrepancies, as illustrated in Chen et al. (2009); Pinardi et al. (2020); Compernelle et al. (2020b); Dimitropoulou et al. (2020). While the MAX-DOAS picks up small local enhancements, the much larger satellite pixel provides a smoothed perception of the field. This In particular for sounders with footprints (much) larger than the emission sources, this generally leads to under-estimation in urban conditions while having better agreement in remote locations (Celarier et al., 2008; Kanaya et al., 2014; Pinardi et al., 2020); ~~as it is the case in the current study.~~ Dimitropoulou et al. (2020) showed specific improvements of the S5p NO₂ comparison results

in the case of the Uccle MAX-DOAS when making use of the multiple azimuthal scan mode and when improving the S5p selection criteria to pixels along the MAX-DOAS field of view direction and within the effective sensitivity length. Large inhomogeneities around MAX-DOAS sites were also shown by (Wang et al., 2014; Ortega et al., 2015; Gratsea et al., 2016; 405 Peters et al., 2019; Schreier et al., 2020). When taking part of these inhomogeneities into account in validation of other sounders, results had been improved (Brinksma et al., 2008). Judd et al. (2019) also showed the smoothing of the NO₂ field when re-sampling GeoTASO high-resolution airborne measurements to different simulated satellite pixel sizes.

Second: Vertical sensitivity (and thus averaging kernels) and a priori vertical profiles are known to be different for MAX-DOAS and nadir UV-visible satellite retrievals (Wang et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019b; Compernelle et al., 2020b), with MAX-DOAS measurements sensitive to layers close to the surface and satellite retrievals sensitive mostly to the free troposphere. The effect of the a-priori vertical profile on the comparison was estimated for TROPOMI by Dimitropoulou et al. (2020) for Uccle, showing an increase by about 55% when recalculating the TROPOMI column with MAX-DOAS daily mean tropospheric profile. Similarly, Ialongo et al. (2020) and Zhao et al. (2019) show improvement of the agreement between TROPOMI and Pandora total column data for episodes of NO₂ enhancement, when replacing the coarse a-priori NO₂ profiles with high-resolution 415 profiles from a high-resolution regional air quality forecast model. Explicit aerosol Somewhat related to the vertical sensitivity is the treatment of aerosol optical depth and its vertical profile. Poor representation of the aerosol opacity has been shown (from simulations) to cause both underestimated NO₂ in satellite retrievals and overestimated NO₂ in MAX-DOAS measurements (Leitão et al., 2010; Ma et al., 2013; Jin et al., 2016). Satellite-ground discrepancies in previous validation studies have already been attributed to such aerosol issues (Boersma et al., 2018; Compernelle et al., 2020b). Moreover, explicit aerosol corrections 420 in the satellite retrievals may further S5p retrievals have already been shown to improve the agreement (Liu et al., 2020).

Third: The treatment of cloud properties can have a significant effect on the retrieval of the TROPOMI NO₂ tropospheric VCD. Eskes et al. (2020) discuss the comparison with OMI NO₂ tropospheric column retrievals and show that on an average TROPOMI is lower than OMI by -10% to -12% over Europe, North America and India, and up to -22% over China. This difference is mainly attributed to the different cloud data product used in the NO₂ retrieval: FRESCO-S derives the cloud 425 top pressure from TROPOMI radiances in the near-infrared O₂-A band, while for OMI the cloud top pressure is retrieved from the O₂-O₂ band in the UV-Visible. Preliminary validation results (Compernelle et al., 2020a, and H. Eskes, private communication) indicate that FRESCO-S is biased high in pressure, especially at altitudes close to the surface. A new version of FRESCO-S with an adapted wavelength window has been implemented and seems to remove most of the 10-22% bias with OMI in polluted regions.

430 Fourth: Although this work, Compernelle et al. (2020b), and Pinardi et al. (2020) all show a generally good coherence of the validation results among the MAX-DOAS instruments across the network and also among MAX-DOAS and Pandora instruments, network homogenization remains an important challenge to focus on to improve the accuracy of future satellite validations -(see Sect. 4 for a description of contributors to network in-homogeneity). Inter-comparison campaigns, such as the CINDI-1 and -2 (Peters et al., 2012; Kreher et al., 2019), in-depth intercomparison studies of the retrieval methods (Frieß 435 et al., 2019; Tirpitz et al., 2020; Peters et al., 2019), and dedicated projects aiming at the harmonization of the processing and

of the associated metadata (such as the FRM4DOAS project of ESA's Fiducial Reference Measurements programme) are an important way to achieve this.

Regarding the mutual consistency of MAX-DOAS and PGN based validation results: while it may appear that, at low column values, PGN base comparisons indicate a smaller bias than the MAX-DOAS comparisons, one must not forget that
440 PGN measures the total column: at stations with a lower total column value, the stratospheric contribution is relatively more important. The better agreement here is therefore consistent with the good agreement found for the TROPOMI stratospheric NO₂ column vs. ZSL-DOAS and also vs. PGN at pristine mountain sites (Section 3). For sites characterised by a higher total NO₂ column, the tropospheric contribution becomes more important, and some of the same effects that make satellite-to-MAX-DOAS comparisons difficult, such as smoothing difference error, lower sensitivity of the satellite close to the surface,
445 and approximate S5p a-priori profile, come into play as well.

In conclusion, the first two years of Copernicus S5p TROPOMI NO₂ column data produced both with the NRTI and OFFL versions 01.0x.xx of the operational processors, do meet mission requirements for the bias, and to some extent and with precaution for the uncertainty (dispersion). The different data products available publicly through the Copernicus system are mutually consistent, in good geophysical and quantitative agreement with ground-based correlative data of documented quality,
450 and can be used for a variety of applications, on the condition that the features and limitations exposed here are taken into proper consideration, and that the S5p data are filtered and used according to the recommendations provided in the official Product Readme File (PRF) and associated documentation, also available publicly. Ground-based validation activities relying on the correlative measurements contributed by the NDACC ZSL-DOAS, MAX-DOAS and PGN global monitoring networks, have progressed significantly in recent years and have demonstrated their capacity, but also their current limitations in an
455 operational context such as the Copernicus programme. Room does exist for further improvement of both the satellite and ground-based data sets, as well as the intercomparison methodology and its associated error budget. Beyond the methodology advances published here and in aforementioned papers, special effort is needed to understand fully and ever reduce comparison mismatch errors, which so far make difficult the accurate validation of S5p data uncertainty bars. Several updates of the calibration of TROPOMI spectra and of the TROPOMI NO₂ data retrieval processors are already in development and in
460 implementation. Upcoming data versions should be validated with the same system as used in the current paper, allowing the necessary independent assessment of the S5p data product evolution.

Appendix A: Ground networks

A1 The NDACC ZSL-DOAS network

Table A1. ZSL-DOAS hosting stations, ordered by latitude, that are contributing to the stratospheric NO₂ column validation. Several measures of the agreement between TROPOMI and the ground-based data are also provided. The bias over all stations (median over all station median differences) is $-0.23 \text{ Pmoleccm}^{-2}$ while the overall dispersion (median over all 1/2IP68) is $0.31 \text{ Pmoleccm}^{-2}$ and the inter-station dispersion (1/2IP68 over all station medians) is $0.30 \text{ Pmoleccm}^{-2}$.

Station	Latitude [deg]	Longitude [deg]	Altitude [m]	a.m.s.l.	Institute	Processing	Median diff. [Pmolec/cm ²]	Spread (IP68/2) [Pmolec/cm ²]	R
Eureka	80.05	-86.42	610		U. Toronto	NDACC	0.04 = 1%	0.60	0.89
Eureka	80.05	-85.42	610		LATMOS-CNRS + U. Toronto	LATMOS_RT	-0.00 = 0%	0.20	0.97
Ny-Ålesund	78.92	11.93	10		NILU	LATMOS_RT	-0.93 = -26%	0.24	0.97
Scoresbysund	70.48	-21.95	67		LATMOS-CNRS + DMI	LATMOS_RT	-0.16 = -5%	0.32	0.98
Sodankylä	67.37	26.63	179		LATMOS-CNRS + FMI	LATMOS_RT	-0.42 = -12%	0.37	0.97
Harestua	60.00	10.75	596		BIRA-IASB	NDACC	-0.19 -0.18 = -8.6%	0.35 0.36	0.82 0.95
Zvenigorod	55.69	36.77	220		IAP, RAS	NDACC	-0.64 -0.04 = -20.2%	0.73 0.67	Nan 0.69
Bremen	53.10	8.85	27		IUP Bremen	NDACC	-0.60 = -19%	0.40	0.91
Paris	48.85	2.35	63		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.50 = -16%	0.56	0.59
Guyancourt	48.78	2.03	160		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.40 = -13%	0.45	0.71
Haute Provence (O.H.P.)	43.94	5.71	650		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.23 = -8%	0.23	0.94
Issyk-Kul	42.62	76.99	1640		KNU	NDACC	-0.33 = -9%	0.19	0.48
Athens	38.05	23.86	527		IUP Bremen + NOA	NDACC	-0.02 = -1%	0.28	0.89
Izaña	28.31	-16.50	2367		INTA	NDACC	-0.10 = -4%	0.14	0.95
Saint-Denis	-20.90	55.48	110		LATMOS-CNRS + LACy	LATMOS_RT	0.05 = 2%	0.18	0.80
Bauru	-22.35	-49.03	640		LATMOS-CNRS + UNESP	LATMOS_RT	-0.31 = -12%	0.19	0.80
Lauder	-45.04	169.68	370		NIWA	NDACC	-0.77 = -23%	0.28	0.92
Kerguelen	-49.35	70.26	36		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.21 = -7%	0.34	0.94
Rio Gallegos	-51.60	-69.32	15		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.45 = -16%	0.28	0.95
Macquarie	-54.50	158.94	6		NIWA	NDACC	-1.01 = -27%	0.48	0.93
Ushuaia	-54.82	-68.32	7		INTA	NDACC	0.09 = 4%	0.40	0.95
Marambio	-64.23	-56.72	198		INTA	NDACC	0.20 0.09 = 43%	0.39	0.50 0.97
Dumont d'Urville	-66.67	140.02	45		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	0.20 = 5%	0.50	0.95
Neumayer	-70.63	-8.25	43		U. Heidelberg	NDACC	-0.06 = -5%	0.21	0.95
Dome Concorde	-75.10	123.31	3250		LATMOS-CNRS	LATMOS_RT	-0.16 = -6%	0.38	0.95
Arrival Heights	-77.83	166.66	184		NIWA	NDACC	-0.52 = -26%	0.25	0.90

Table A2. MAX-DOAS hosting stations, ordered by increasing median tropospheric column (VCD_{gb} , lowest at the bottom), that are contributing to the tropospheric NO_2 column validation. More details on the QA4ECV data sets can be found at <http://www.qa4ecv.eu/ecvs>. References are the following: [a] [Arellano et al. \(2016\)](#), [b] [Friedrich et al. \(2019\)](#), [c] [Xing et al. \(2017\)](#), [d] [Xing et al. \(2020\)](#), [e] [Hendrick et al. \(2014\)](#), [f] [Irie et al. \(2011\)](#), [g] [Irie et al. \(2012\)](#), [h] [Irie et al. \(2015\)](#), [i] [Kanaya et al. \(2014\)](#), [j] [Vlemmix et al. \(2010\)](#), [k] [Gjelen et al. \(2014\)](#), [l] [Hoque et al. \(2018b\)](#), [m] [Drosoglou et al. \(2017\)](#). Several measures of the agreement between TROPOMI and the ground-based data are also provided. Biases and comparison spreads vary strongly between stations, mainly as a function of the nature of the site (clean or polluted). When calculating these numbers for the three regimes (clean, polluted, extreme), the median biases are: -0.3, -2 and -12 Pmolec/cm² (-23%, -37% and -51%) respectively, with median dispersions of: 0.7, 3.4 and 7 Pmolec/cm². Note that the median values for the high tropospheric columns (Athens to Xianghe) are almost the same as the statistics found for the whole network. The site-to-site bias dispersion is 0.2, 1.2 and 3.3 Pmolec/cm² for each regime.

Station	Latitude		Longitude	Altitude m a.m.s.l.	Institute	Retrieval and Format		Reference	Median [Pmolec/cm ²]
	[deg]	[deg]				Type	[Pmolec/cm ²]		
Vallejo	19.48	-99.15	2255	UNAM	Arellano et al. (2016) ; Friedrich et al. (2019)	OE (MMF)	GEOMS	[a,b]	29
UNAM	19.33	-99.18	2280	UNAM	Arellano et al. (2016) ; Friedrich et al. (2019)	OE (MMF)	GEOMS	[a,b]	19
Cuatitlan	19.72	-99.20	2263	UNAM	Arellano et al. (2016) ; Friedrich et al. (2019)	OE (MMF)	GEOMS	[a,b]	17
Gucheng	39.15	115.73	13.4	USTC	Xing et al. (2017, 2020)	GA	ASCII	[c,d]	14
Xianghe	39.75	116.96	95	BIRA-IASB	Hendrick et al. (2014)	OE (bePRO)	GEOMS	[e]	11
Chiba	35.60	140.10	21	ChibaU	Irie et al. (2011, 2012, 2015)	PP	ASCII	[f,g,h]	8.6
Yokosuka	35.32	139.65	10	JAMSTEC	Kanaya et al. (2014)	PP	GEOMS	[i]	8.1
Kasuga	33.52	130.48	28	ChibaU	Irie et al. (2011, 2012, 2015)	PP	ASCII	[f,g,h]	7.3
Mainz	49.99	8.23	150	MPIG	QA4ECV dataset	GEOMS			7.3
Cabauw	51.97	4.93	3	KNMI	Vlemmix et al. (2010)	PP	GEOMS	[j]	6.7
Uccle	50.80	4.36	120	BIRA-IASB	Gjelen et al. (2014)	OE (bePRO)	GEOMS	[k]	5.7
De Bilt	52.10	5.18	20	KNMI	Vlemmix et al. (2010)	PP	GEOMS	[j]	5.4
Bremen	53.10	8.85	27	IUPB	QA4ECV dataset	GEOMS			5.2
Pantnagar	29.03	79.47	237	ChibaU	Hoque et al. (2018b)	PP	ASCII	[f,g,h,l]	4.6
Thessaloniki_lap	40.63	22.96	60	AUTH	Drosoglou et al. (2017)	QA4ECV dataset	GEOMS	[m]	4.6
Thessaloniki_ciri	40.56	22.99	70	AUTH	Drosoglou et al. (2017)	QA4ECV dataset	GEOMS	[m]	3.6
Athens	38.05	23.86	527	IUPB	QA4ECV dataset	GEOMS			3.4
Phimai	15.18	102.56	212	ChibaU	Hoque et al. (2018a)	PP	ASCII	[f,g,h,l]	2
Fukue	32.75	128.68	80	JAMSTEC	Kanaya et al. (2014)	PP	GEOMS	[i]	0.95

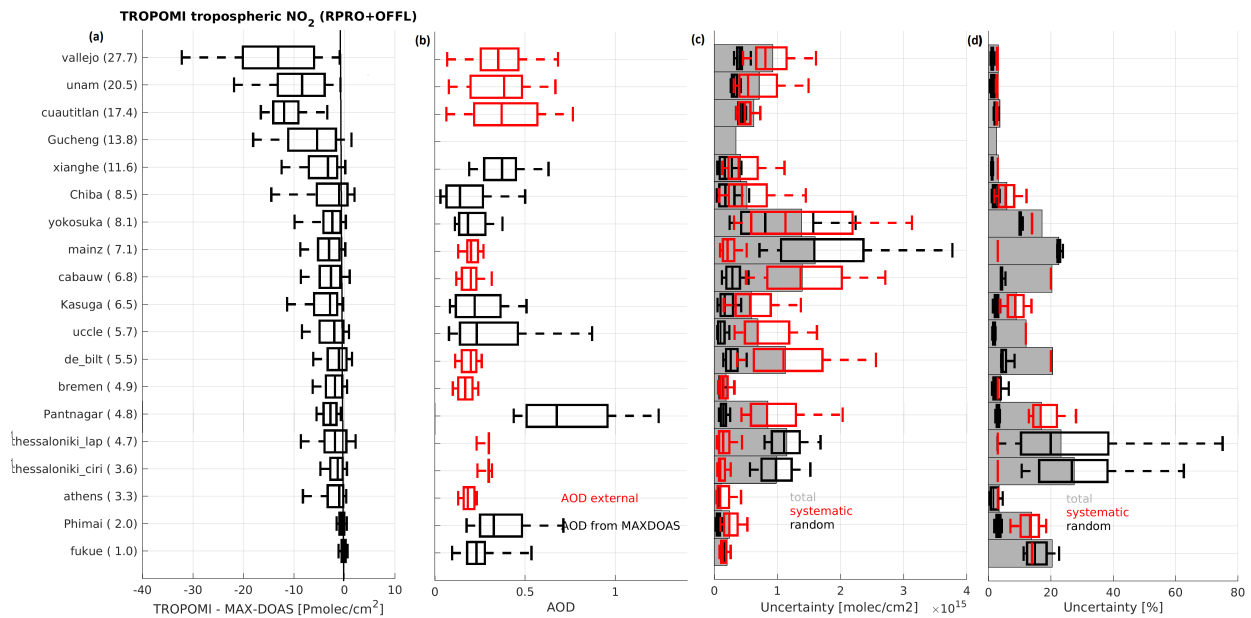


Figure A1. (a) Box-and-whisker plots summarizing the TROPOMI - MAX-DOAS tropospheric VCD difference, per station, ordered as a function of the median ground-based tropospheric column (largest median VCD values on top). (b), (c) and (d) present, respectively, the assumed aerosol optical depth (AOD, either retrieved from the MAX-DOAS measurement or taken from the climatology used in the NO_2 retrieval), the MAX-DOAS absolute uncertainties, and the relative uncertainties (total median uncertainty in grey bars, random part in black and systematic part in red).

Table A3. PGN stations, ordered by median PGN NO₂ column value, that are contributing to the total NO₂ validation. Mountain-top stations (not sensitive to lower lying tropospheric NO₂ are marked with an asterisk. In the last row, we indicated where the data can be obtained (EVDC or directly from the PGN website). Note that only PGN data from a recent quality upgrade (with file version 004 or 005, where 005 has precedence) was used. The bias over all stations (median over all station medians) is -0.5 Pmoleccm⁻² (-7%) while the overall dispersion (median over all I/ZIP68) is 1.8 Pmoleccm⁻² and the inter-station dispersion (I/ZIP68 over all station medians) is 2.2 Pmoleccm⁻². Considering the low NO₂ stations (Alice Springs to New Brunswick) only, the bias is 0.1 Pmoleccm⁻² (2%), the overall dispersion is 1.1 Pmoleccm⁻² and the inter-station dispersion is 0.2 Pmoleccm⁻². For the high NO₂ stations (Buenos Aires to UNAM), the bias is -3.6 Pmoleccm⁻² (-30%), the overall dispersion is 3.3 Pmoleccm⁻² and the inter-station dispersion is 1.4 Pmoleccm⁻². Note that the mountain-top stations are not used in the calculation of these overall statistics.

Station code	Full name	Lat [°]	Lon [°]	Alt [m]	PGN med(VCD)	med(diff)	med(reldiff)	I/ZIP68(diff)	R archive
					[Pmoleccm ⁻²]	[Pmoleccm ⁻²]	[Pmoleccm ⁻²]	[Pmoleccm ⁻²]	
unam	National Autonomous University of Mexico	19.33	-99.18	2280	18.7	-2.1;-10%	4.6	0.87	both
Bayonne	Bayonne	40.67	-74.13	3	15.6	-4.3;-31%	3.2	0.88	EVDC
queens_ny	New York Queens College	40.74	-73.82	25	14.7	-3.7;-26%	3.6	0.84	EVDC
sapienza	Rome Sapienza	41.90	12.52	75	14.2	-6.6;-46%	4.0	0.81	EVDC
city_college_ny	New York City College	40.82	-73.95	113	13.7	-4.7;-34%	3.4	0.91	EVDC
isacrome	Rome CNR-ISAC	41.84	12.65	117	10.5	-2.7;-29%	3.2	0.85	both
bronx_ny	New York - The Bronx	40.87	-73.88	31	10.3	-1.0;-13%	3.3	0.90	both
athens_noath	Athens National Observatory	37.99	23.77	130	10.0	-3.4;-35%	2.8	0.70	PGN
innsbruck	Innsbruck	47.26	11.39	616	9.8	-4.7;-48%	3.4	0.59	PGN
buenos_aires	Buenos Aires	-34.56	-58.51	20	8.6	-1.8;-20%	2.6	0.86	both
new_brunswick	New Brunswick (NJ)	40.46	-74.43	19	6.4	-0.0;-0%	1.5	0.90	PGN
gsfc	Goddard Space Flight Center	38.99	-76.84	90	5.9	-0.1;-1%	1.3	0.80	both
charles_city	Charles City (VA)	37.33	-77.21	6	5.6	-0.2;-3%	2.0	0.44	both
boulder	Boulder	39.99	-105.26	1660	5.4	0.0;1%	1.6	0.87	both
oldfield_ny	New York - Old Field	40.96	-73.14	3	5.3	0.2;5%	1.1	0.93	both
helsinki	Helsinki	60.20	24.96	97	5.1	0.5;8%	1.0	0.77	EVDC
canberra	Canberra	-35.34	149.16	600	4.8	-0.9;-19%	0.9	0.64	EVDC
inoe	Magurele	44.34	26.01	93	4.7	0.3;8%	1.0	0.79	EVDC
fairbanks	Fairbanks	64.86	-147.85	227	4.7	0.1;3%	1.4	0.43	EVDC
egbert	Egbert	44.23	-79.78	251	4.3	0.5;12%	0.6	0.88	PGN
comodoro_rivadavia	Comodoro Rivadavia	-45.78	-67.45	46	3.5	-0.1;-2%	0.6	0.56	PGN
izana*	Izana	28.31	-16.50	2360	2.9	0.6;19%	0.5	0.53	both
mauna_loa*	Mauna Loa	19.48	-155.60	4169	2.7	0.2;6%	0.5	0.43	both
alice_springs	Alice Springs	-23.76	133.88	567	2.7	0.2;8%	0.4	0.61	EVDC
altzomoni*	Altzomoni	19.12	-98.66	3985	2.3	0.7;28%	0.6	0.64	both

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Competing interests. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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