

Brussels, November 21st, 2024

Briefing on the JRC/EEA report on the state of soils in Europe

To all Brilian Partners, members of the ABF, or any interested party:

On 22 October 2024, the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's science and knowledge service and the European Environment Agency (EEA) [published a report on the state of soils in Europe](#). This report delves into the intricate interplay between drivers, pressures and impacts on soil in the 30 Member States of the European Environment Agency (EEA), along with six cooperating countries from the West Balkans, Ukraine and UK, shedding light on the multifaceted challenges facing soil conservation efforts. The analysis shows the complex interactions among various factors, both anthropogenic and natural, shaping soil degradation processes and their subsequent consequences. **It highlights key findings, including the significant impacts of soil degradation in agriculture, ecosystem resilience, water quality, biodiversity, and human health, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive soil management strategies.** Moreover, the examination of citizen science initiatives underlines the importance of **engaging the public in soil monitoring and conservation efforts**. This work emphasises the policy relevance of promoting sustainable soil governance frameworks, supported by research, innovation, and robust soil monitoring schemes, to safeguard soil health and ensure the long-term resilience of ecosystems.

Currently, there is no EU-wide legislation specifically on soil, although many policy instruments relevant to soil protection are in place. Under the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, part of the European Green Deal, the European Commission presented a new EU soil strategy for 2030, with the aim of having all EU soil ecosystems in a healthy condition by 2050. To achieve this objective, on 5 July 2023 it tabled a proposal for a soil monitoring and resilience directive, laying down measures for monitoring and assessing soil health, based on a common definition of what constitutes healthy soil, for managing soils sustainably, and for tackling contaminated sites. While stakeholders agree on the need for a soil monitoring framework, some have raised concerns about the indicators chosen to describe and assess soil health, provisions on land take, the lack of a roadmap, plans and intermediate targets to achieve the overarching 2050 objective, application of the polluter pays principle, and funding available to support land owners and managers.

On 10 April 2024, the European Parliament adopted its position at first reading. MEPs voted a more cautious position than the Envi Commission's proposals. Parliament voted to exclude raw material deposits from the definition of soil. It added flexibility for monitoring and assessing soil health, allowing Member States to apply the soil descriptors that best illustrate the soil



The project is supported by the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking and its members under grant agreement N° 101112436. Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CBE JU. Neither the European Union nor the CBE JU can be held responsible for them.



characteristics of each soil type at national level. Parliament decided not to retain the mandatory timeline proposed in the ENVI report for upgrading soil status. It voted to remove Member States' obligations to define sustainable soil management practices, regularly assess the effectiveness of the measures taken, and review and revise them if necessary. It therefore also deleted the proposed list of sustainable soil management principles. Parliament deleted the proposed provisions on penalties.

The Council agreed its general approach on 17 June 2024. Trilogue negotiations started on 22 October 2024.

In the light of the decisions of the European Parliament, it is unlikely that Member States will take significant and incisive actions to protect and enhance soil health. Whilst there may be exceptions to this in certain MS, an opportunity for a more comprehensive approach appears to have been lost for the time being.



European
Bioeconomy
Bureau

(formerly the European Circular Bioeconomy Policy Initiative)

TR ID 513420241041-72 VAT# VAT#BE0788.235.559

Rue d'Oultremont 34, B-1040 Bruxelles

www.bioeconomybureau.eu

newman@bioeconomybureau.eu

+44 7435 840357