



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
ENVIRONMENT
Directorate D - Biodiversity
ENV.D.1 – Land Use & Management

Factual summary of the online public consultation on “soil health – protecting, sustainably managing and restoring EU soils”

Disclaimer: This document should be regarded solely as a summary of the contributions made by stakeholders who responded to the online public consultation conducted in the context of the Soil Health Law. It cannot in any circumstances be regarded as the official position of the Commission or its services. Responses to the consultation activities cannot be considered as a representative sample of the views of the EU population.

1. INTRODUCTION

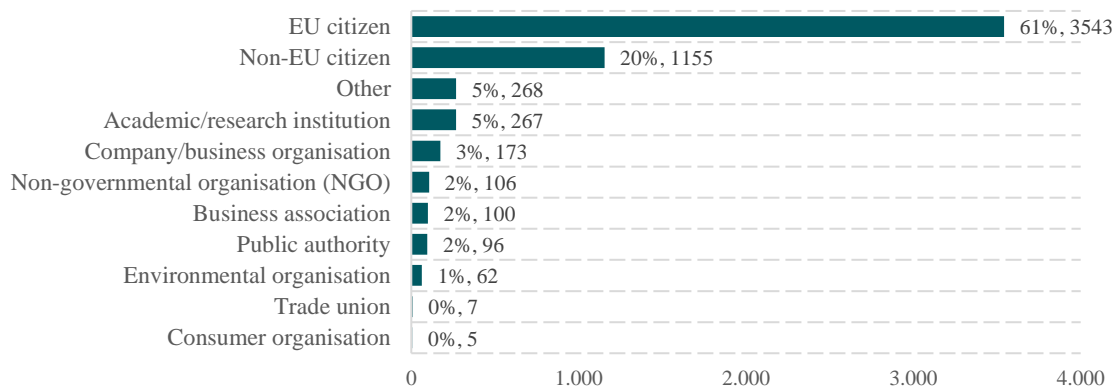
The EU Soil Strategy for 2030 envisages that all soils in the EU should be in a healthy condition by 2050 and that the protection, sustainable use and restoration of soil should become the norm. The Strategy announced that the Commission will table a new legislative proposal on soil health. This online public consultation is part of the impact assessment that will be used to draft this legislative proposal.

The online public consultation activities were conducted through the Commission’s ‘Have your say’ website available in all 24 official EU languages. The public could fill the questionnaire between 1 August 2022 and 24 October 2022, via the website of the European Commission. The questionnaire was split in two parts: the first part was more general and intended for everyone, while the second part was aimed at stakeholders with some expertise on the subject. The online public consultation was part of a larger stakeholder consultation process that took place throughout Q2-4 of 2022. In addition, semi-structured interviews and a stakeholder meeting were organised and targeted questionnaires have been disseminated among stakeholders.

2. INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

A total of 5 801 stakeholders submitted responses to this online public consultation. Before commencing the analysis of the responses to the questionnaire, the data was cleaned. One campaign from the Bavarian Forest Owners Association (i.e., defined as more than 10 identical questionnaire submissions, in this case 19)¹ was identified by analysing received answers in an Excel tool. The campaign was separated from the dataset and analysed as a standalone contribution. The main dataset thus contains **5 782 responses**. The majority of respondents identified themselves as EU citizens (r=3 543; 61%), followed by non-EU citizens (r=1 155; 20%). The distribution of stakeholder types is presented in Figure 1. Furthermore, a total of 268 respondents (5%) identified themselves as ‘other’ and 267 respondents (5%) as academic / research institution. Within public authorities, regional-level public authorities are the highest represented public authority grouping (r=37; 1%).

Figure 1 Stakeholder type (n=5 782)



¹ Better Regulation Toolbox 2021 - Chapter 7. Available [here](#).

Figure 2 shows the number of respondents from the 30 most represented countries. **All Member States from the EU27 are represented and together they make up 70% of responses (r=4 059).** This means that 30% of respondents are not from EU Member States. More specifically, 14% of total respondents come from India and 6% come from the United Kingdom, respectively taking the second and fifth place in the total ranking of countries of origin. Of these respondents, for India 79% are citizens, while for the United Kingdom 85% are citizens. The remainder 10% of respondents are from 86 different countries, with a number of responses for each country spanning from 1 to 74. The influence of non-EU respondents on the responses to the consultation questions will be reflected upon in the long consultation report.

Figure 2 Country of Origin, top 30 countries (n=5 353)

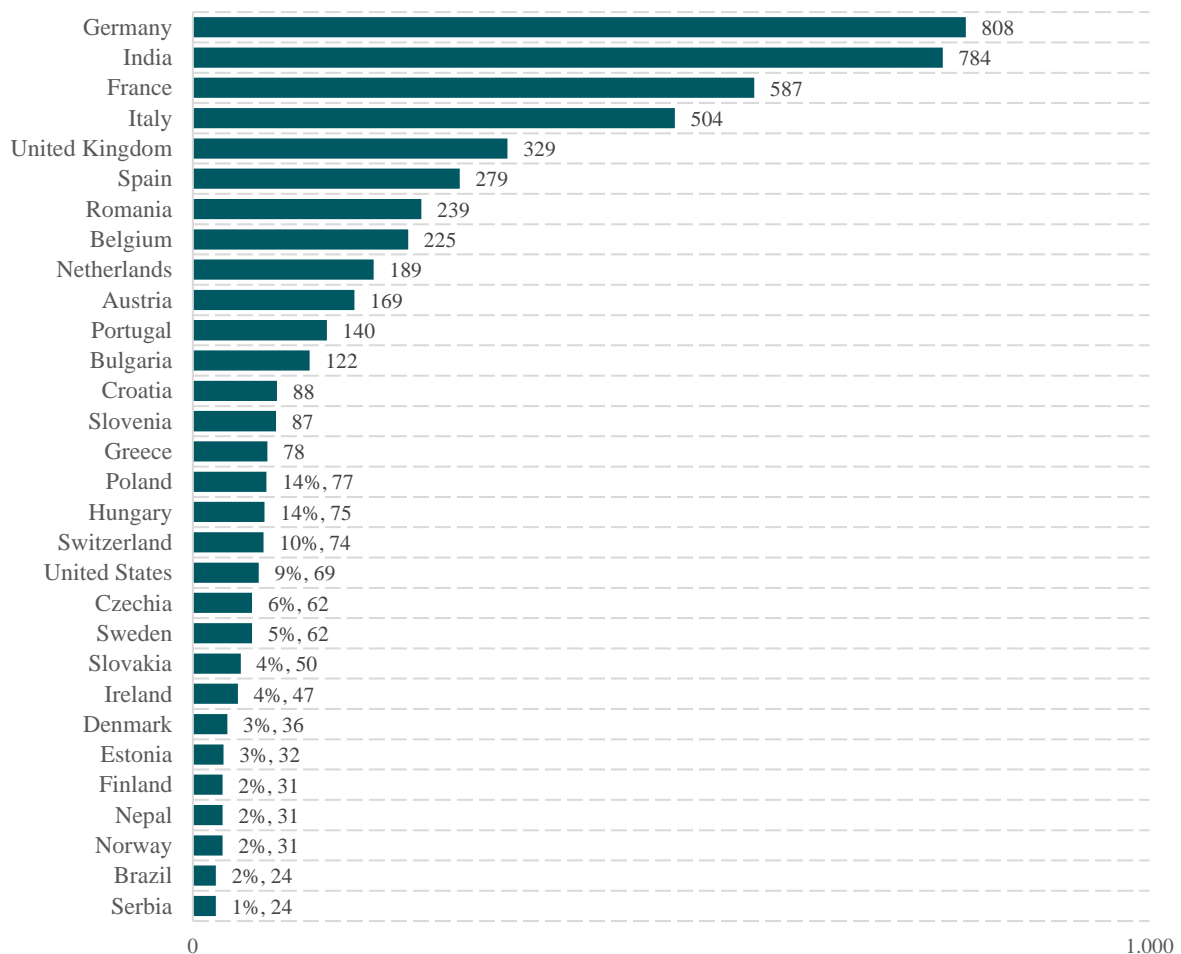
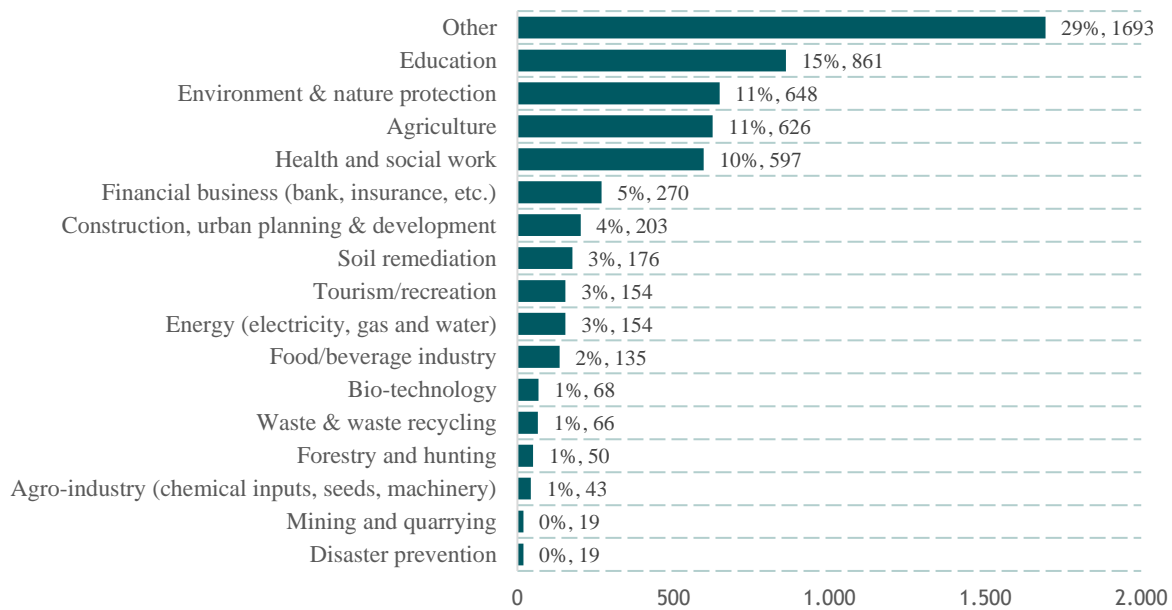


Figure 3 shows that besides the ‘other’ sectors (29%, r=1 693), a significant number of respondents came from the sectors education (15%, r=861), environment & nature protection (11%; r=648) and agriculture (11%; r=626).

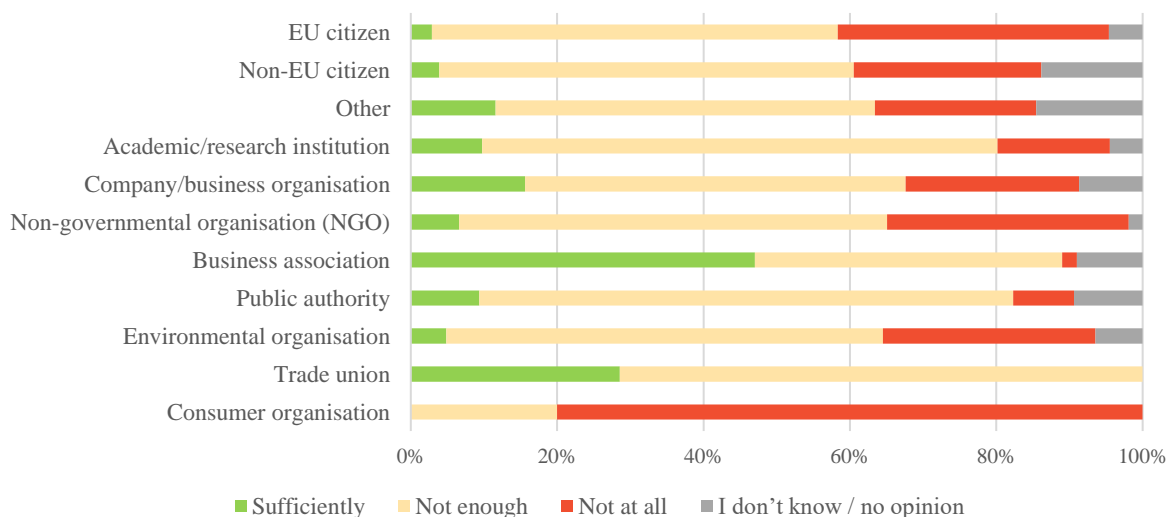
Figure 3 Sector of activity (n=5 782)



3. PART I - GENERAL QUESTIONS

Out of the total number of non-citizen respondents (n=1 084), 58% (r=634) thinks these causes are ‘not enough’ addressed. Furthermore, 19% (r=208) indicated ‘not at all’ and 14% (r=152) indicated ‘sufficiently’. The remaining respondents indicated ‘I don’t know/no opinion’. A breakdown per stakeholder category for these responses is shown in Figure 4. Two stakeholder categories stand out in the number of respondents who think that the causes of soil and land degradation are sufficiently addressed at EU level, namely business associations (47%; r=47) and trade unions (29%, r=2).

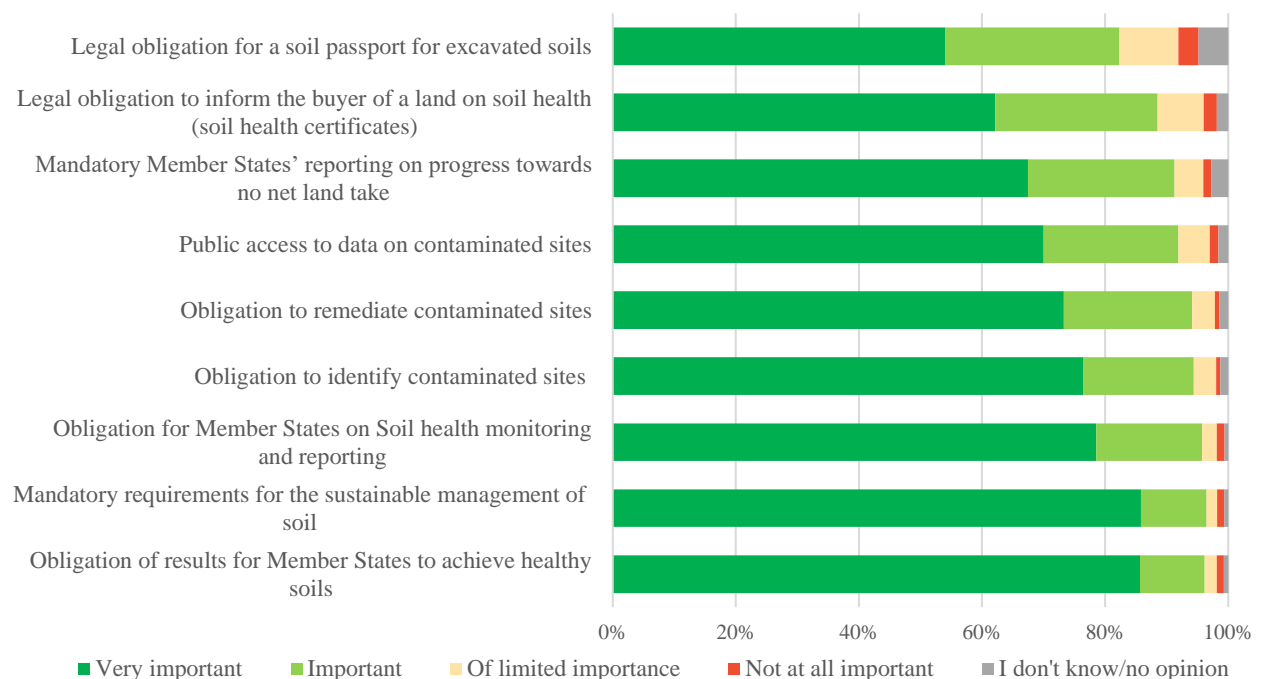
Figure 4 ‘In your opinion, are the causes of soil and land degradation sufficiently addressed at EU level’ (n=5 782)²



² The total number of respondents within each category are: EU citizens = 3 543; non-EU citizens = 1 155; other = 268; academic/research institutions = 267; company/business organizations = 173; NGOs = 106; business associations = 100; public authorities = 96; environmental organizations = 62; trade unions = 7; consumer organizations = 5

One of the questions required respondents to rank the importance they attribute to the different identified **provisions for achieving healthy soils in the EU by 2050**. The answers are shown in Figure 5. It is clear that most options are considered as very important by the majority of respondents. ‘Mandatory requirements for the sustainable management of soil’ (r=4 961) and ‘Obligation of results for Member States to achieve healthy soils’ (r=4 954) were ranked first by the share of people who think this is ‘very important’ (86%). The option considered as the least important to include is ‘Legal obligation for a passport for excavated soils’ (‘very important’: 54%; r=3 122).

Figure 5 ‘Please rank the importance you attribute to the different provisions for achieving healthy soils in the EU by 2050’ (n=5 782)

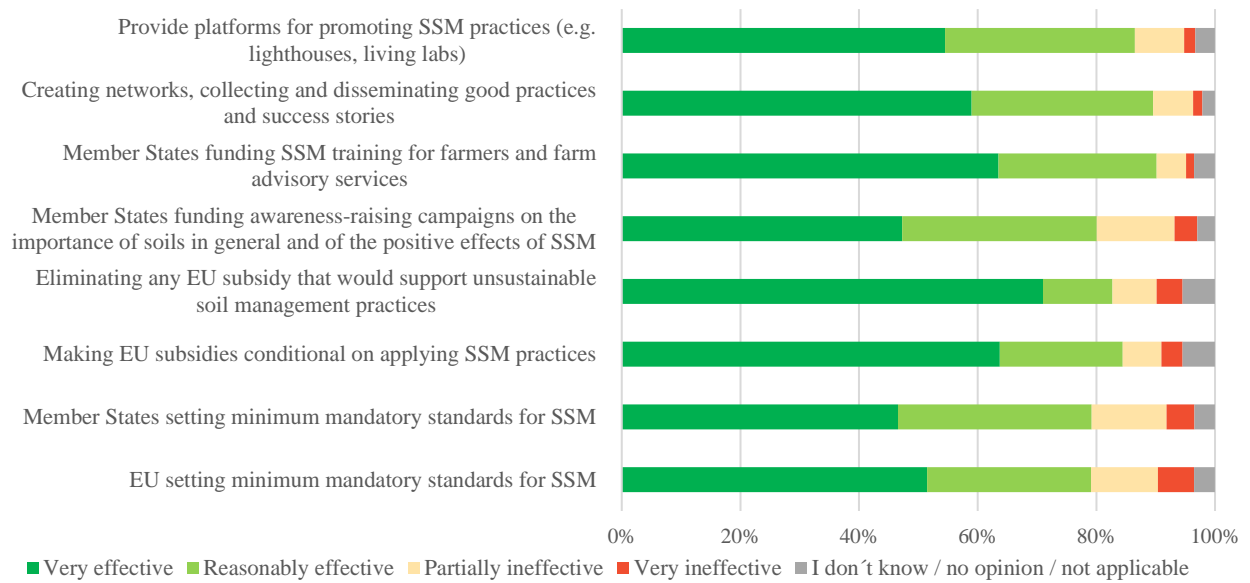


4. PART II – SPECIALISED QUESTIONS

Due to the technical nature of soil health, the respondents could choose to not fill in the second part of the questionnaire. This second part contained ‘specialised questions’ more directed towards experts and focusing on scientific conditions and sustainable soil management. These questions were answered by 1 331 respondents.

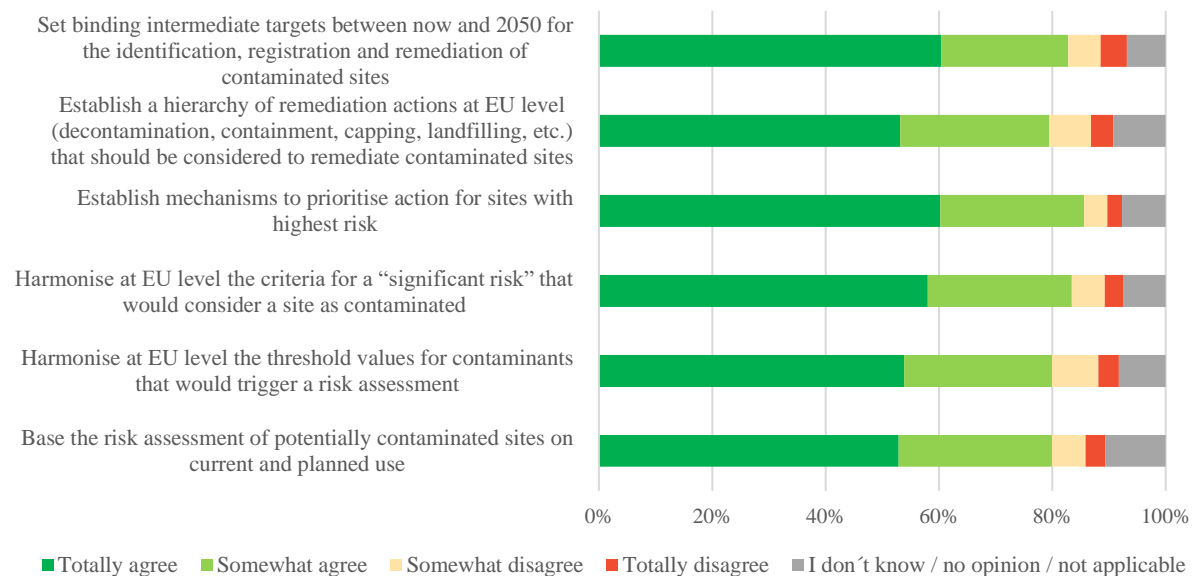
When asked to reflect on the **effectiveness of certain measures in ensuring sustainable soil management (SSM) practices across different economic sectors**, the majority of respondents indicated that they think all measures are very effective or reasonably effective. The measure ranking in the first place was ‘Member States funding SSM training for farmers and farm advisory services’ (90%; r=1 200). The least favourably ranked measure was ‘EU setting minimum mandatory standards for SSM’ (80%; r=1 053).

Figure 6 ‘In your view, how do you rank the effectiveness of the following measures in helping to ensure sustainable soil management (SSM) practices across different economic sectors?’ (n=1 331)



Illustrated in Figure 7, respondents indicated their degree of agreement with including certain measures related to soil contamination in the Soil Health Law. All statements achieved similar ratings across all agreement categories. The most often, respondents totally and somewhat agreed to ‘Establish mechanisms to prioritise action for sites with high risks’ include in the Soil Health Law (85%, n=1 139).

Figure 7 ‘Do you consider the following measures related to soil contamination should be included in the Soil Health Law’ (n=1 331)



5. ADDITIONAL REMARKS AND FEEDBACK

A total of 195 respondents provided additional remarks and opinions, including suggestions for publicly available materials and/or publications that should be considered further in relation to the impact assessment. 74 respondents submitted position papers as a part of their response.