

Soil monitoring and resilience

Highly diverse, soils host more than 25 % of all biodiversity and are the second largest carbon pool on the planet. During its first April 2024 session, the European Parliament is expected to adopt its position at first reading on a European Commission proposal aimed at establishing the first-ever EU-wide common framework on soils.

Background

Soil and soil-dwelling organisms deliver services that are essential to life, including food provision and regulation of the water, carbon and nutrient cycles. As soil formation is an extremely slow process, longer than a human lifetime, soil is considered a non-renewable resource. [Evidence](#) shows that soil degradation is prevalent and extensive across the territory of the EU, with about 60-70 % of soils in an unhealthy state; this costs the EU over €50 billion per year. Currently, there is no EU-wide legislation specifically on soil. Therefore, in a 2021 [resolution](#) the Parliament called on the Commission to design a common EU legal framework, with full respect for the subsidiarity principle, for the protection and sustainable use of soil, addressing all major soil threats. Under the [new EU soil strategy for 2030](#), on 5 July 2023 the Commission tabled [a proposal for a directive on soil monitoring and resilience](#), also called the 'soil monitoring law'.

European Commission proposal

The long-term objective of the proposed directive is to put in place a coherent monitoring framework for all soils across the EU and to improve soil health continuously, with a view to achieving healthy soils by 2050 and maintaining them in healthy condition. Accordingly, the proposal lays down measures for monitoring and assessing soil health, based on a common definition of what constitutes a healthy soil; for managing soils sustainably; and for tackling contaminated sites. To manage soils and meet the requirements of the directive, Member States would be required to establish soil districts throughout their territory.

European Parliament position

The report adopted on [11 March 2024](#) by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) would enable soil district authorities to draw up their own soil district plans. To respect the autonomy of the countries willing to implement more comprehensive monitoring systems, Member States would be able to choose among three tiers for soil monitoring design, with different soil descriptors and soil health criteria. Tier 1 includes a minimum set of descriptors that need to be covered. The report proposes a more nuanced approach for assessing soil health, based on a five-level classification of soil ecological status (high, good, moderate ecological status, degraded and critically degraded soils). Soils would be deemed healthy if they achieve either good or high ecological status. Member States would have 10 years to upgrade the status of critically degraded soils to degraded soils, and six years to improve the classification of degraded soils to moderate ecological status, and of soils with moderate ecological status to good ecological status. The report adds flexibility to the proposed sustainable soil management requirements, and asks the Commission to compile a sustainable soil management toolbox, with practical information for soil managers. It supports the setting up of a public register of contaminated and potentially contaminated sites. The text is due to be voted in plenary in April 2024. The Council has yet to adopt its general approach.

First-reading report: [2023/0232\(COD\)](#); Committee responsible: ENVI; Rapporteur: Martin Hojsík (Renew, Slovakia). For further information, see our 'EU Legislation in progress' [briefing](#).

[Outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#): This proposal is relevant for measures 2(1), (3), (5).



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