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LIFE Platform Meeting on Soils

CONCEPT NOTE

The purpose of this document is to provide relevant background to the participants of the **LIFE Platform Meeting on Soils** and basic indications on the main features of the event.

The general objectives of all the LIFE Platform Meetings are as follows:

a) To **promote networking**, including exchanges of best practices and lessons learnt between ongoing and closed LIFE projects, relevant stakeholders and other EU-funded projects;

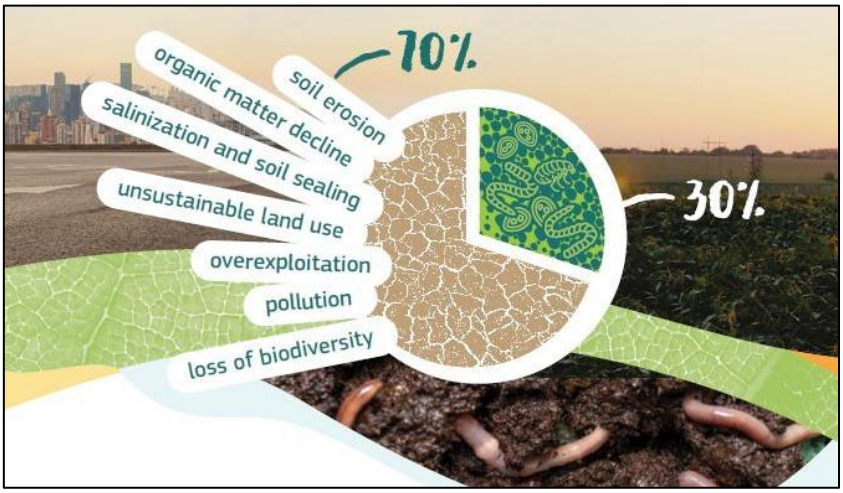
b) To convey **strategic feedback** and provide valuable input to policy makers to advance the planning, implementation and update of environmental, climate and energy policies; and

c) To promote the **added value of the LIFE Programme** in a specific environmental theme and showcase selected projects.

[1] The images in this document are extracted from the factsheet on "EU Soil Strategy for 2030": https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/13fda7ad-5450-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-274442496

1. Policy background

Legislative initiatives on soils have been intensified recently at European level. Particularly, in November 2021 the European Commission launched the "**EU Soil Strategy for 2030**" (Communication COM/2021/699) that sets out a framework and concrete measures to protect soils and ensure that they are used sustainably. It sets a vision and objectives to achieve healthy soils by 2050, with concrete actions by 2030. It also announced a legislative initiative on soil health "to ensure a level playing field and a high level of environmental and health protection". The **Soil Monitoring law proposal**[2] was adopted by the Commission on 5 July 2023.



In line with the above goal, the following results are expected to be achieved by 2030:

- Land degradation including desertification in drylands is strongly reduced and 50% of degraded land is restored moving beyond land degradation neutrality.
- High soil organic carbon stocks (e.g., in forests, grasslands, peatlands) are conserved and current carbon concentration losses on cultivated land (0.5% per year) are reversed to an increase by 0.1-0.4% per year. The area of peatlands losing carbon is reduced by 30-50%.
- No net soil sealing and an increased re-use of urban soils for urban development from the current rate of 13%-50%, to help stop the loss of productive land to urban development and meet the EU target of no net land take by 2050.
- Reduced soil pollution, with at least 25% area of EU farmland under organic agriculture; a further 5-25% of land with reduced risk from eutrophication, pesticides, anti-microbials and other contaminants, and a doubling of the rate of restoration of polluted sites.
- Prevention of erosion on 30-50% of land with unsustainable erosion rates.
- Improved soil structure to improve habitat quality for soil biota and crops including a 30 to 50% reduction in soils with high-density subsoils.

[2] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/soil-and-land/soil-health_en#background

To help reach climate neutrality, for the first time, the revised Regulation on **land, land use change and forestry (LULUCF)** has a separate land-based net carbon removals target of 310 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent by 2030. The Regulation requires Member States to enhance the quality of monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) of emissions and removals, thanks to new land monitoring technologies, techniques, and equipment, such as digital mapping and Earth observation, and datasets generated by the EU's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).

In November 2022, the Commission proposed a **regulatory framework for the certification of carbon removals**. Once the co-decision phase with the Council and the European Parliament is concluded (expected: first half of 2024), the next step will be to adopt Delegated Acts with the certification methodologies for carbon farming.
The certification methodologies will define specific rules to ensure that carbon farming activities comply with these four quality criteria:

- Quantification: carbon farming activities must have a net positive impact for climate change mitigation.
- Additionality: Carbon removal activities need to go beyond existing practices and what is required by law.
- Long-term storage: Certificates are linked to the duration of carbon storage.
- Sustainability: Carbon removal activities must preserve or contribute to sustainability objectives such as climate change adaptation, circular economy, water and marine resources, and biodiversity.

Moreover, in September 2021 the Commission launched five EU Missions, among which "*A Soil Deal for Europe: 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030*" within the framework of the Horizon Programme.

2. Focus of the LIFE Platform Meeting

The LIFE programme has financed various projects dealing with soil issues in different environmental sectors. In particular, it is possible to identify three main sectors into which the past and ongoing projects can be included:

- Soil conservation and climate change adaptation (including the urban context)
- Soil contamination and bioremediation
- Soil management and climate change mitigation in the agricultural sector

This categorisation will be reflected also in the **Working Groups** that will be organised during the afternoon session of the meeting. These groups will be used to discuss technical/policy/economic issues concerning the relevant soil sector and how to support the implementation of the "Actions" foreseen in the EU Soil Strategy – and that presumably will be further stressed by the forthcoming Soil Directive - in the various Member States.

In addition, some specific soil-related aspects will be addressed through speeches held by stakeholders invited to the event and further elaborated in the Working Groups; the following is a list of the main **horizontal topics** that will be discussed:

- Methodology and possibly constraints to constantly monitor the soils health and the results achieved through specific projects.
- Strategies to support the role of soils in tackling climate change issues, such as the certification of carbon removals in sustainable managed farmlands and other ecosystem services provided by soils.
- How to promote the soil literacy, information to the public and societal engagement in soil conservation initiatives.
- Economic opportunities linked to the solutions to be adopted for the conservation of soils.
- A holistic approach to soils: how water and soil are closely interlinked.

The participants are expected not only to briefly present the outputs of their projects but will be invited to contribute with their wider professional experience in identifying technical bottlenecks or lingering issues and describe best practises to attain the policy objectives in the EU Member States.

3. Timing

The Platform Meeting on Soils will be held on **10-11 April 2024** in Pamplona (Spain) and will be organised as a two-day meeting (see the annexed draft agenda).

4. Location

The Platform Meeting is hosted by the Spanish project *LIFE16 IPC/ES/0000001 LIFE Nadapta-CC* and co-organised by the Coordinating Beneficiary "Gobierno de Navarra - Departamento de Desarrollo rural y Medio Ambiente". The project *LIFE18 IPC/ES/000001 Urban Klima 2050* (located in the Basque Country) is involved in the organisation of the field visit as well as the urban and soil remediation aspects, enabling the meeting to properly cover multiple sectors linked to different contexts (rural and urban).