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Report Name: European Commission Launches Missions to Address Climate and Sustainability Issues

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Report Highlights:

On September 29, 2021, the European Commission launched five “EU missions” to address climate and sustainability issues through funding of research and development. "A Soil Deal for Europe" is one of these missions and aims to increase healthy soil levels in Europe by 2030.

European Commission Launches Missions to Address Climate and Sustainability Issues

On September 29, 2021, the European Commission launched its five “EU missions” to address climate and sustainability issues through funding of research and development:

1. **Adaptation to Climate Change:** support at least 150 European regions and communities to become climate resilient by 2030.
2. **Cancer:** working with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to improve the lives of more than 3 million people by 2030 through prevention, cure and solutions to live longer and better.
3. **Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030:** cleaning marine and fresh waters, restoring degraded ecosystems and habitats, decarbonizing the blue economy in order to sustainably harness the essential goods and services they provide.
4. **100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030:** support, promote and showcase 100 European cities in their systemic transformation towards climate neutrality by 2030 and turn these cities into innovation hubs for all cities, benefiting quality of life and sustainability in Europe.
5. **A Soil Deal for Europe:** 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030.

What are EU missions?

EU missions are a new EU policy tool that aim to support the priorities of the European Commission through the Horizon Europe program. Horizon Europe is the EU's main funding program for research and innovation, with a budget of €95.5 billion for the period from 2021-2027. The five missions were agreed upon by the European Parliament, EU Member States and the European Commission. They were designed in the context of the EU's strategic planning process. Therefore, the missions will directly support EU priorities such as the European Green Deal, Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, the New European Bauhaus, as well as the EU's renewed industrial competitiveness agenda and the European Space Programme, while all supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Missions have a mandate to engage with EU citizens and stakeholders where relevant. According to the Commission, missions should “fully mobilize and engage with public and private actors, such as EU Member States, regional and local authorities, research institutes, entrepreneurs and public and private investors, all to create real and lasting impact. A particularly critical element of EU missions will be to reach out to local communities and engage with Europe's citizens to ensure there is societal uptake of these new solutions and approaches.” Each of the five EU missions sets out concrete and measurable targets and specific timeframes.

On September 29, the Commission launched the implementation of the first five EU missions, including a mission on soil health.

“A Soil Deal for Europe: 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030”

"A Soil Deal for Europe – 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030" is the mission launched by the Commission that touches upon agriculture. The mission's goal is to increase healthy soil levels in Europe beyond the current rate of 30-40 percent, although the exact target

for 2030 is not yet specified. This goal consists of a series of sub-objectives to help reach existing EU policy targets related to soil degradation, soil sealing, pollution and erosion, the protection and restoration of soil ecosystems and soil biodiversity and soil carbon sequestration and protection. The mission also aims at reducing the EU's global soil footprint.

Please see below for the full list of objectives. Some of these objectives such as the reduction of fertilizer use or the increase of land under organic farming are already part of the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Mission Goal: 100 living labs and lighthouses to lead the transition towards healthy soils by 2030			
Objectives	Mission targets in line with EU and global commitments	Baseline (see 8.A)	Soil health indicators
1.Reduce land degradation relating to desertification	T 1.1: Halt desertification to help achieve land degradation neutrality and start restoration ----- In line with SDG 15.3	25% of land in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe at risk of desertification.	All eight soil health indicators
2.Conserve and increase soil organic carbon stocks	T 2.1: Current carbon concentration losses on cultivated land (0.5% per year) are reversed to an increase by 0.1-0.4% per year T 2.2: the area of peatlands and wetlands losing carbon is reduced and the natural sink is significantly increased to help meet GHG reduction targets by 2030 and the Climate law goal by 2050. ----- In line with the Fit for 55 Climate Energy Package (Climate Law, revised LULUCF regulation) and the Paris Agreement 4 per mille initiative.	Area of land with low and declining carbon stocks = 23%. Area of degraded peatland = 4.8%	Soil organic carbon stock Vegetation cover
3.No net soil sealing and increase the reuse of urban soils	T 3.1: increase urban recycling of land beyond 13% and switch from 2.4% to no net soil sealing as a contribution towards meeting the target of no net land take by 2050. ----- In line with Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe, and Biodiversity Strategy including upcoming nature restoration targets	Area of land affected by soil sealing = about <1% of EU, but can be as high as 2.4%, Current rate of recycling of urban land for development: 13%	Soil structure (incl. soil bulk density, absence of soil sealing, erosion and water infiltration) Vegetation cover
4.Reduce soil pollution and enhance restoration	T 4.1: reduce the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50% T 4.2 reducing fertilizer use by at least 20% T 4.3: reduce nutrient losses by at least 50% T 4.4: 25% of land under organic farming T 4.5: Reduce microplastics released to soils to meet 30% target of zero pollution action plan T.4.6 Halt and reduce secondary Salinization All to be achieved by 2030 to contribute to meeting the target by 2050 that soil pollution is reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to health and natural ecosystems. ----- In line with the Biodiversity strategy, the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Zero Pollution Action plan.	27% - 31% of land with excess nutrient pollution Soil contamination: 2.5% (non-agricultural), 21% (conventional arable), ca. 40-80% of land from atmospheric deposition depending on the pollutant. Farmland under organic agriculture: 8.5% (2019)	Presence of soil pollutants, excess nutrients and salts

5.Prevent erosion	T 5.1: reduce the area of land currently affected by unsustainable erosion from 25% to sustainable levels ----- In line with the Roadmap to a resource efficient Europe	Area of land with unsustainable soil water erosion is 25%, with 70% of this being agricultural land.	Soil structure, absence of soil sealing, erosion and water infiltration Vegetation cover Landscape heterogeneity Forest cover
6.Improve soil structure to enhance habitat quality for soil biota and crops	T 6.1: Reduce compaction of soils to go significantly below current levels of 23% - 33% ----- As for forest soils: in line with the new EU Forest Strategy	Area of land with critical levels of soil compaction = 23-33%, 7% of which is outside agricultural area.	Soil structure, absence of soil sealing, erosion and water infiltration. Vegetation cover Landscape heterogeneity
7.Reduce the EU global footprint on soils	T 7.1: Establish the EU's global soil footprint in line with international standards T 7.2: The impact of EU's food, timber and biomass imports on land degradation elsewhere is significantly reduced without creating trade-offs ----- In line with the Zero Pollution Action Plan	Baseline to be created by mission activities	Food, feed and fibre imports leading to land degradation and deforestation
8.Increase soil literacy in society across Member States	T. 8.1: awareness of the societal role and value of soil is increased amongst EU citizens, including in key stakeholder groups, and policy makers T. 8.2: soil health is firmly embedded in schools and educational curricula, to enable citizens' behavioural change towards the adoption of sustainable practices both individually and collectively. T 8.3: citizen involvement in soil and land-related issues is improved at all levels T 8.4: practitioners and stakeholders have access to appropriate information and training to improve skills and to support the adoption of sustainable land management practices.		All eight indicators (on a long term)

Source: European Commission

The budget to support the “soil health” mission will be organized around three main sources of financing:

1. Investments from the mission's budget under Horizon Europe (€320 million for this mission in the period 2021-2023);
2. Support will be provided by the various parts of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP);
3. EU and Member States' potential for investments in the mission area, be they in the form of grants or subsidies or financial instruments.

As part of the mission, the Commission announced that it wants to take the lead internationally in halting land degradation by protecting and restoring soils and the ecosystems services supported by

soils. The EU wants to align concepts of “soil health” at the international level and reduce its global soil footprint from food and timber imports.

To do so, the European Commission wants to capitalize on existing international research and innovation initiatives and partnerships such as:

- The Food and Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture (FNSSA) partnership under the High-Level Policy Dialogue (HLPD) on Science Technology and Innovation between the EU and the Africa Union.
- The EU-CELAC partnership with Latin America and Caribbean countries.
- A partnership with Japan, which has already expressed interest in collaborating with the EU in the Horizon Europe missions, including the soil mission. Japan would also like to explore synergies and complementarities with its “Moonshot” research and innovation program, in particular with the EU soil mission’s objectives 4 and 5 on soil health and food.
- A partnership with Canada, which has already contributed to the design of living labs under the mission and collaborated in preparatory work on agroecology living labs and research infrastructures.

Additionally, the Commission announced that it will work to establish an International Research Consortium (IRC) on soil and carbon with the aim to steer research and innovation cooperation at the global level.

Attachments:

No Attachments.