



# Summary of the Public Consultation on the EU Action Plan “Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil”

*Disclaimer: the contributions received cannot be regarded as the official position of the Commission and its services and thus do not bind the Commission.*

## Introduction

The public consultation supports the preparation of the EU Action Plan “*Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil*”.<sup>1</sup> The Action Plan, which is to be adopted by the European Commission in 2021, intends to:

- Prevent and remedy pollution from air, water, soil, and consumer products
- Mainstream the zero pollution ambition into all policy developments
- Further decouple economic growth from the increase of pollution
- Strengthen the links between environmental protection, sustainable development and people’s wellbeing.

The public consultation was conducted from 11 November 2020 to 10 February 2021. Using EU Survey, the consultation was available in all official EU languages and targeted the following stakeholders:

- Citizens;
- Competent authorities in EU Member States and other EU Institutions;
- EU and national consumer organisations;
- NGOs and other civil society organisations (notably in areas such as health, environment, transport and climate);
- Academia and research institutes working on EU environment and climate policy;
- Businesses and professionals (notably SMEs) operating in key sectors (e.g. environment, transport, climate, agriculture, water, health, aquaculture and fishing, food, energy, other industries including extractive and energy-intensive ones, etc.); and
- Financial institutions, especially those engaged in green finance.

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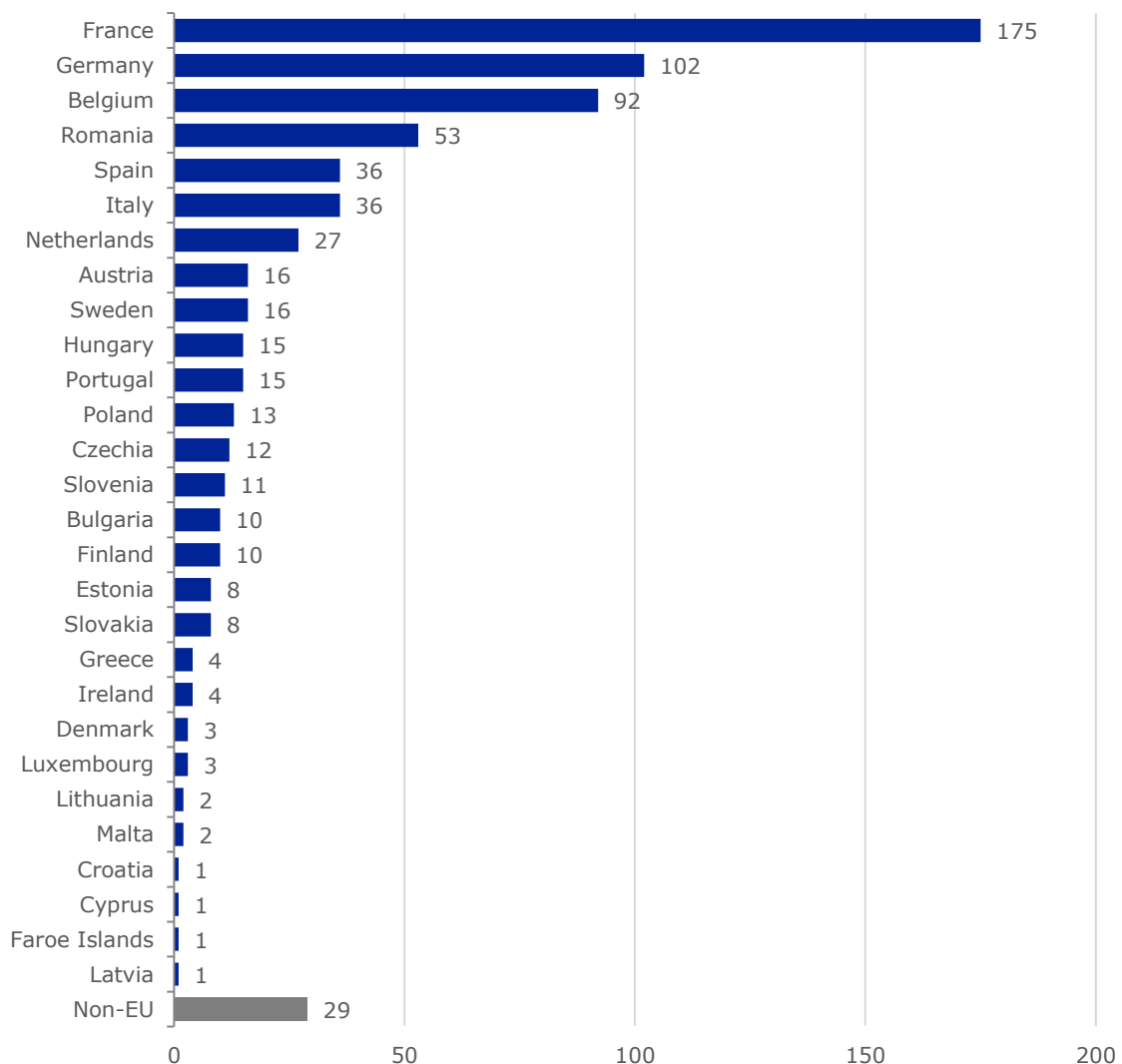
<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_en)

## Overview of respondents

A total of 706 responses (and 77 documents annexed to responses) were received from all 27 EU Member States and 11 non-EU countries.<sup>2</sup> Data was screened and cleaned in line with the Better Regulation Toolbox.<sup>3</sup> Upon careful inspection, no duplicates and no clear-cut campaigns could be identified. Therefore, the final number of responses for the analysis amounted to the full 706 responses submitted.

A total of 175 respondents indicated France as their country of origin, followed by Germany (102), Belgium (92) and Romania (53). The figure below provides a detailed disaggregation of the respondents by their country of origin in descending order.

**Figure 1 Number of respondents by country of origin (EU and non-EU)**



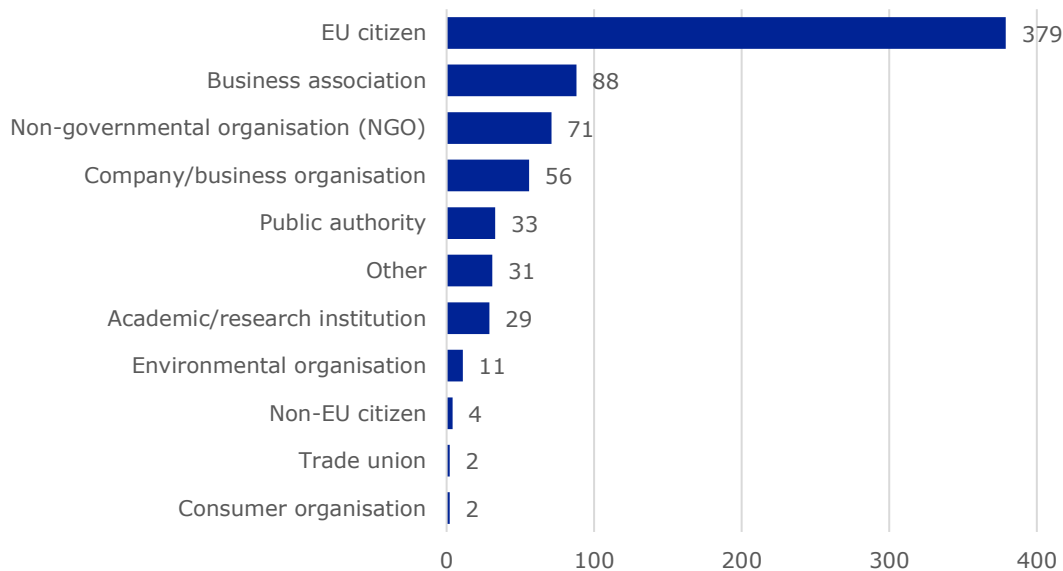
*n*= 706

<sup>2</sup> From non-EU countries, there are responses from Argentina, Brazil, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>3</sup> According to Better Regulation Toolbox 54, the minimum threshold should be 10 or more identical responses (across all closed questions) to count as a 'campaign'.

EU citizens provided the most contributions to this consultation, accounting for 54% of all respondents (379 replies), followed by business associations for 12% (88 replies), NGOs for 10% (71 replies), company/business organisations for 8% (56 replies), public authorities for nearly 5% (33 replies). Academic/research institutions account for another 4% (29 replies) of the overall responses. The remaining 7% (50 replies) of respondents are split between 'other', environmental organisations, non-EU citizens, trade unions and consumer organisations.

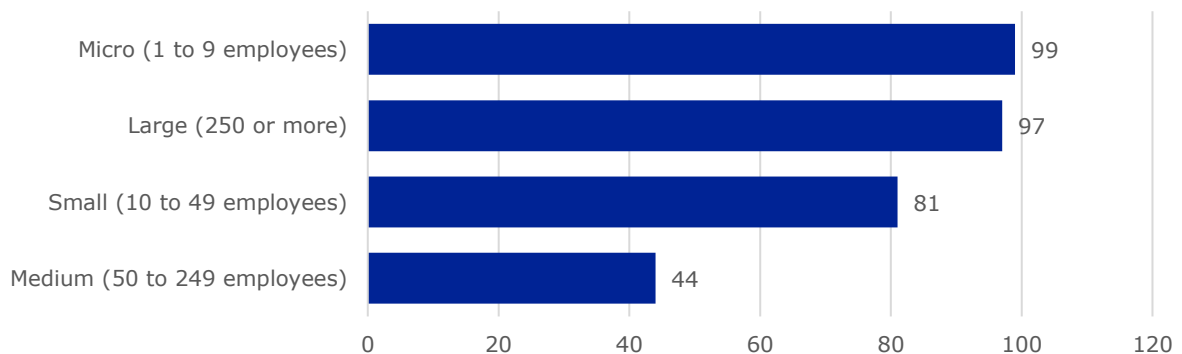
**Figure 2 Number of respondents by stakeholder type**



*n*= 706

Of the 321 organisations that responded to the OPC and provided information on the size of their organisation, 99 identified as micro-organisations with 1 to 9 employees, 97 identified as large organisations of 250 or more employees and another 81 identified as small organisations of 10 to 79 employees. The fewest responses to this optional question, 44, were received from mid-sized organisations (between 50 and 249 employees).

**Figure 3 Number of respondents by size of the organisation**



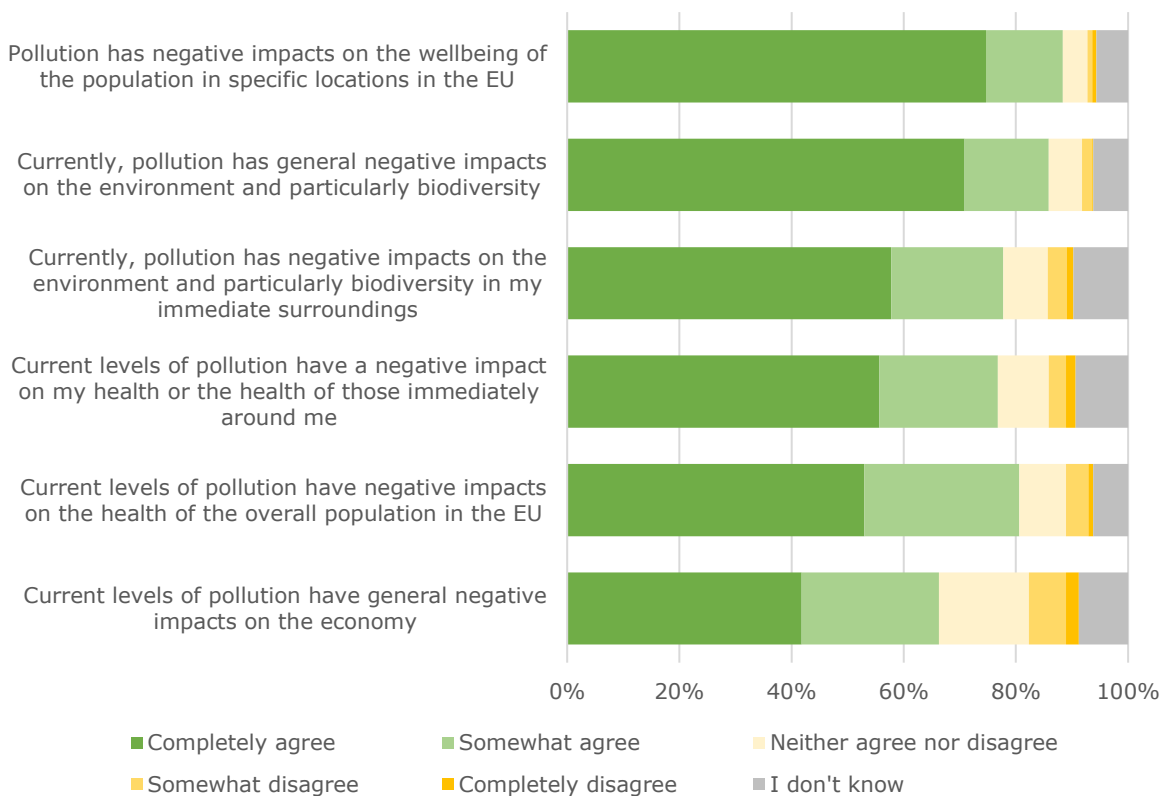
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## Overview of the feedback provided

The first section on *General awareness of pollution and related policies* aims to collect information on the knowledge of respondents on EU environmental pollution and related policies in Europe. The section further seeks to gather information about knowledge of the effects of pollution on people and the environment.

A majority of respondents appear concerned that the current levels of pollution have negative effects on health and the environment. More than 80% of respondents completely agree that the current levels of pollution have negative effects on the wellbeing of residents of specific locations of the EU as well as biodiversity. Agreement is less pronounced for the statement that pollution has negative effects on the economy, while about two-thirds of respondents still completely agree and somewhat agree.

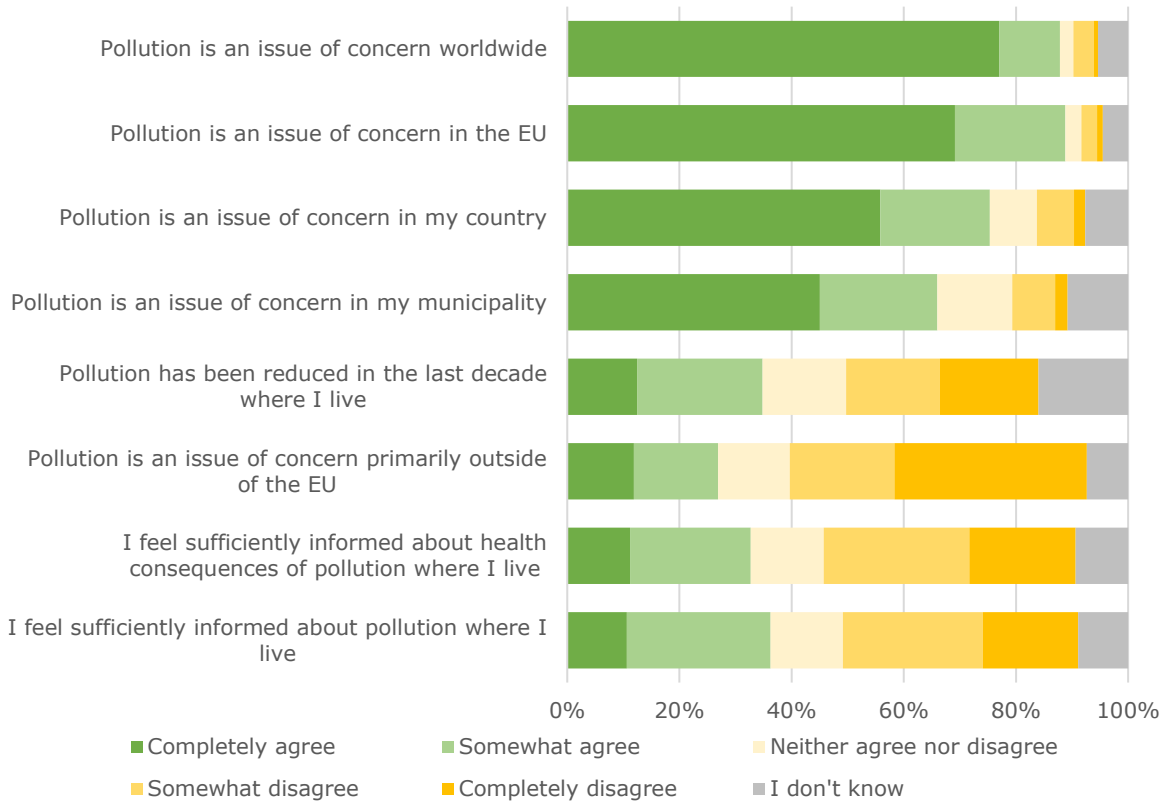
**Figure 4 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the impact of pollution through air, water and soil?**



n= 706

More than half of the respondents (over 50%) completely agree that pollution is an issue of concern worldwide, in the EU, and in the respective country of the respondent. Yet, less than half of the respondents (45%) completely agree that pollution is an issue in their municipality. Over half of the respondents (53%) completely or somewhat disagree that pollution is an issue of concern primarily outside the EU. Respondents do not appear to feel sufficiently informed about pollution and its health consequences in the area where they live, as the share of respondents who completely agree is the smallest (both 11%).

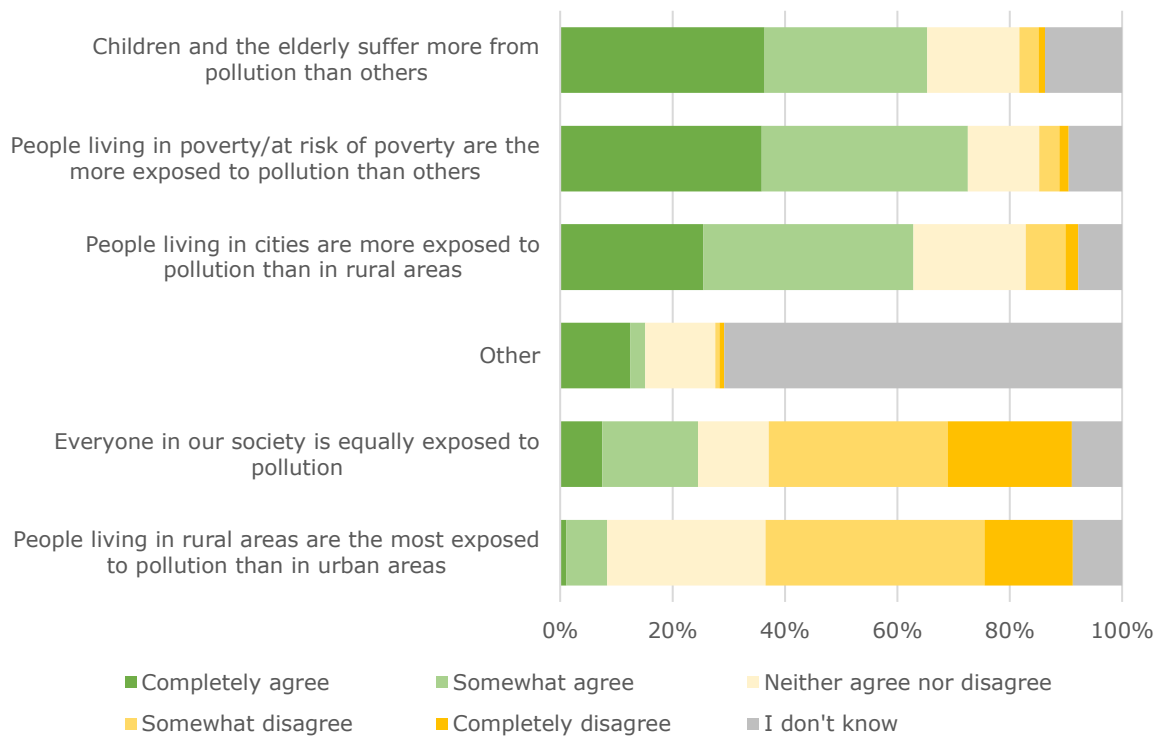
**Figure 5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



*n* = 706

With respect to the impact of pollution on different population groups, 36% of the respondents completely agree and 29% somewhat agree that children and elderly suffer more from pollution, that people living in poverty/at risk of poverty are more exposed than others, and that people living in cities are also more exposed to pollution. Conversely, 16% completely disagreed and 39% somewhat disagree that everyone in society is equally exposed to pollution. Only 7% somewhat agree and 1% completely agree that people living in rural areas are the most exposed to pollution.

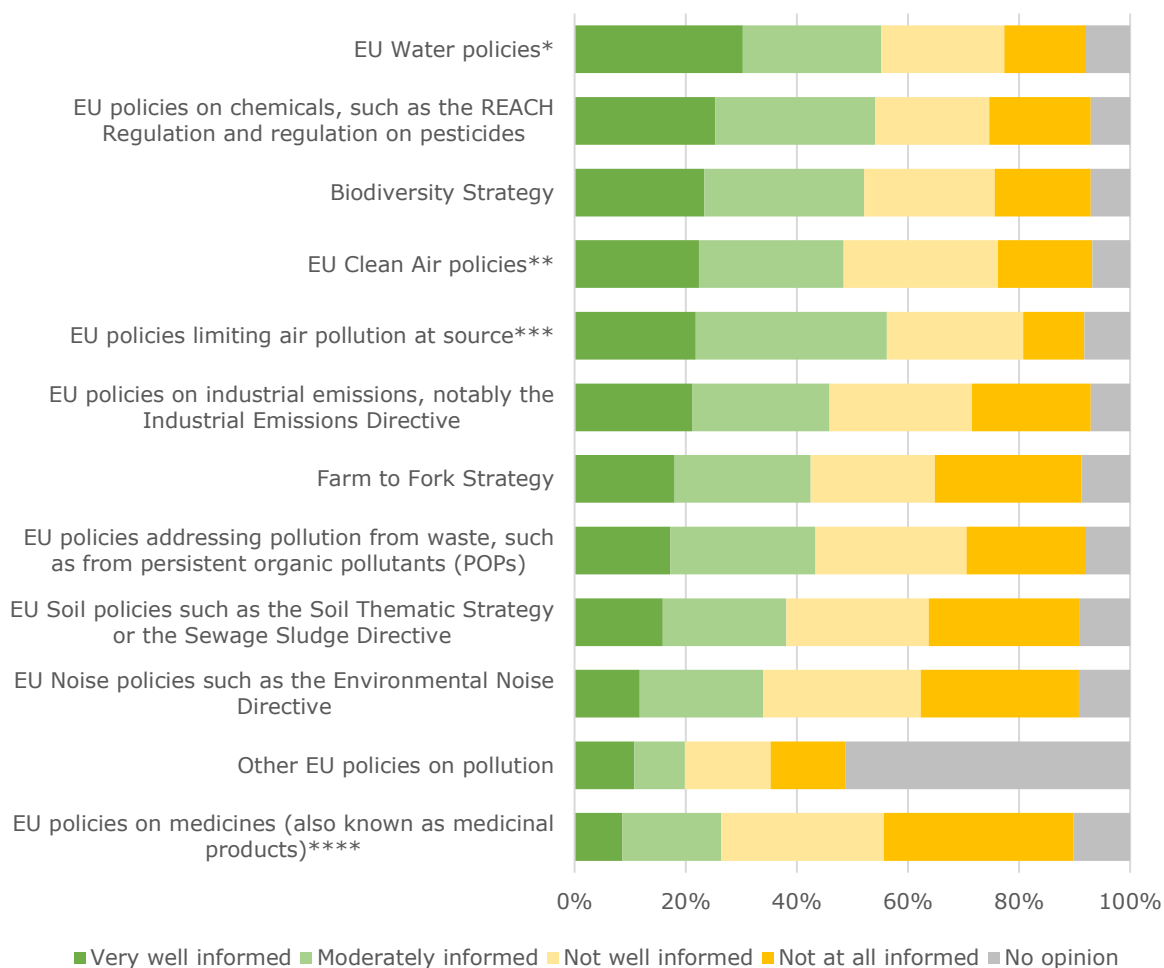
**Figure 6 To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the impact of pollution on different population groups?**



n= 706

With respect to the level of knowledge on EU initiatives addressing pollution, 30% of the respondents feel very well informed on EU water policies, followed by EU policies on chemicals (25%) and the EU's Biodiversity Strategy (23%). Conversely, well over half of the respondents feel not at all informed (34%) or not well informed (29%) on EU policies on medicines.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 7 Have you heard about the following EU initiatives addressing pollution? If so, how much do you know about them?**



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Shortened answer options:

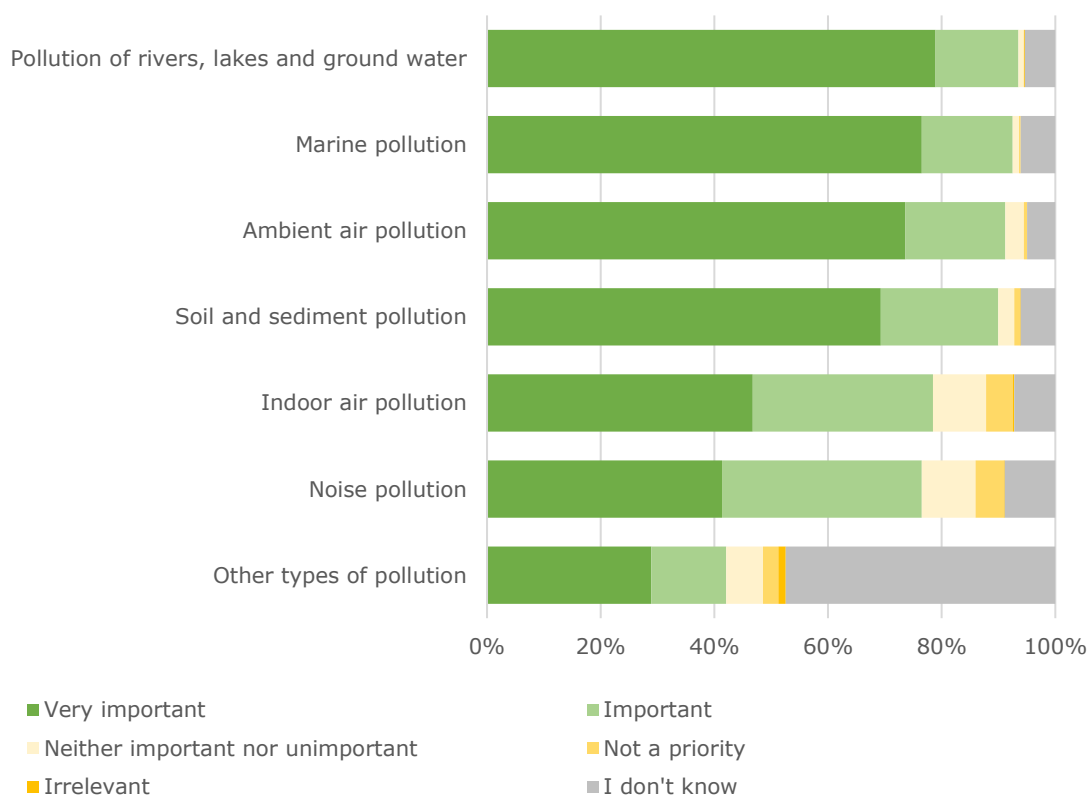
\*EU Water policies such as the Water Framework Directive, the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive, the Drinking Water Directive and the Bathing Water Directive, the Nitrates Directive; \*\*EU Clean Air policies such as the Ambient Air Quality Directives and the National Emission reduction Commitments (NEC) Directive; \*\*\*EU policies limiting air pollution at source, such as Euro standards for cars, buses and trucks, or eco-design rules for heating appliances; \*\*\*\*EU policies on medicines (also known as medicinal products), such as directives or regulations, and the 2019 EU Strategic Approach to Pharmaceuticals in the Environment

<sup>4</sup> Two associations specified that they selected “No opinion” as they preferred not to take a position on the question asked.

The second section on *Views on the state of pollution and related policies* explores the views of stakeholders on the state of pollution, and the importance of pollution in the wider context of environment policy.

More than 3 in 4 of the respondents (79%) indicate that it is very important to address pollution of rivers, lakes, and ground water, followed by marine pollution (76%) and ambient air pollution (74%). There is less agreement on noise pollution, where 41% of the respondents indicate that it is very important to address it, while another 35% indicate that it is important.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 8 How important is it to address the following pathways and depositories of pollution at the EU level.**



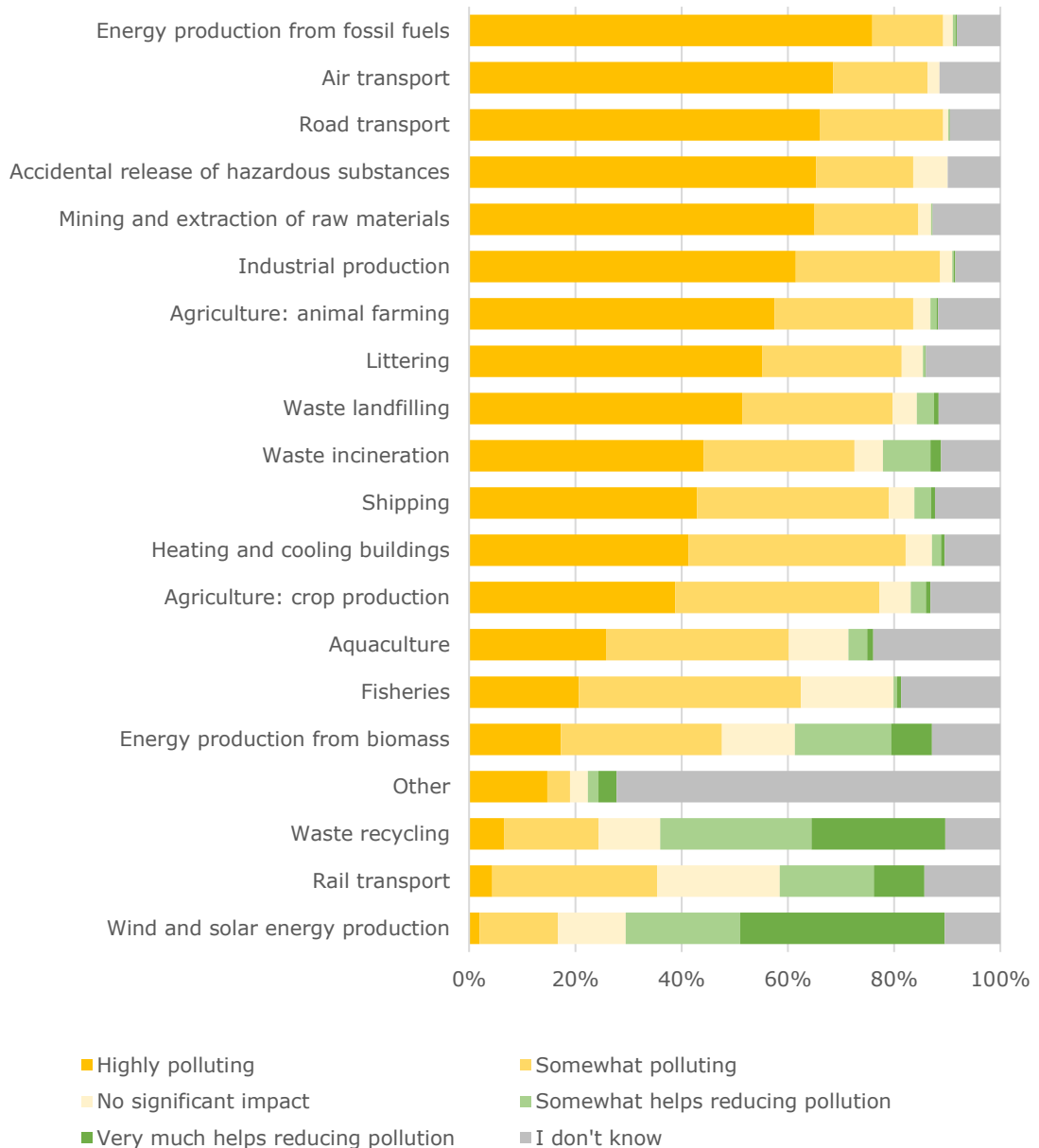
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<sup>5</sup> One association specified that they selected "I don't know" as they preferred not to take a position on the question asked.



With respect to the impact of pollution by the type of activity, more than half of the respondents (50% and above), indicate the following as highly polluting: energy production from fossil fuels (76%), air transport (69%), road transport (66%), accidental release of hazardous substances (65%), mining and extraction of raw materials (65%), industrial production (61%), agriculture: animal farming (58%), littering (55%), and waste landfilling (51%). Conversely, 39% of the respondents consider that wind and solar energy production very much contribute to reducing pollution and 22% consider it to contribute somewhat.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 9 How do you evaluate the impact of the following activities on pollution?**

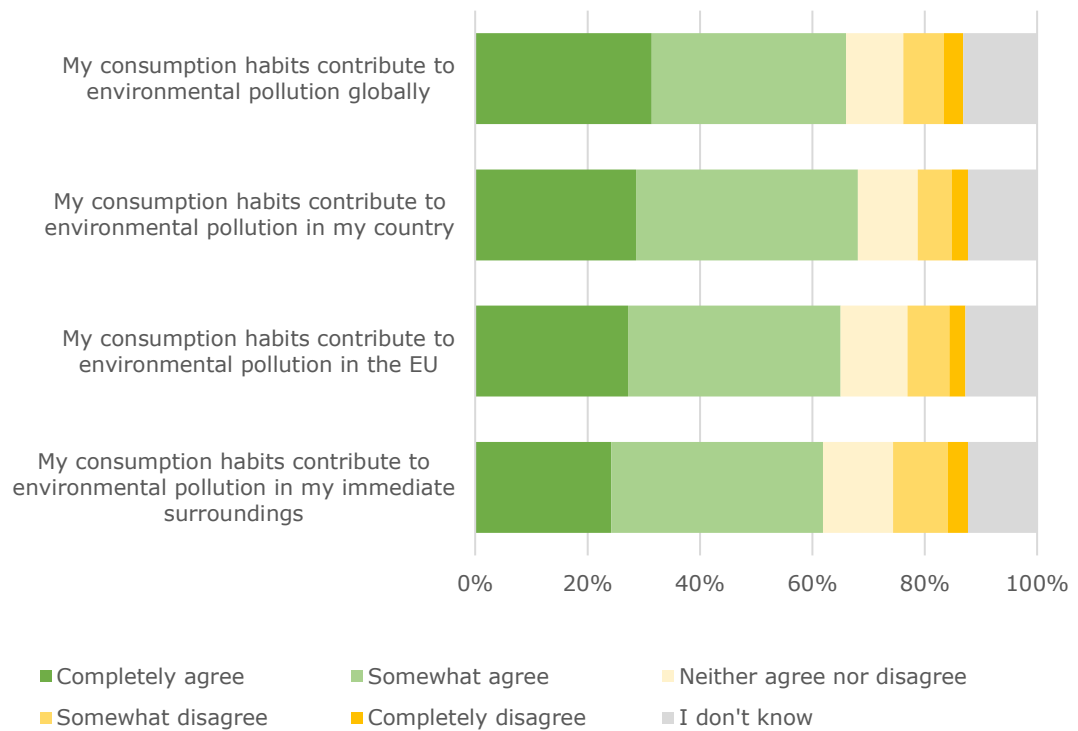


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<sup>6</sup> One association specified that they selected "I don't know" as they preferred not to take a position on the question asked.

24% or more of the respondents completely agree with the statements concerning the contribution of consumption habits to environmental pollution. 31% of the respondents completely agree that their consumption habits contribute to environmental pollution globally, followed by in their country (29%), in the EU (27%), and in their immediate surroundings (24%).

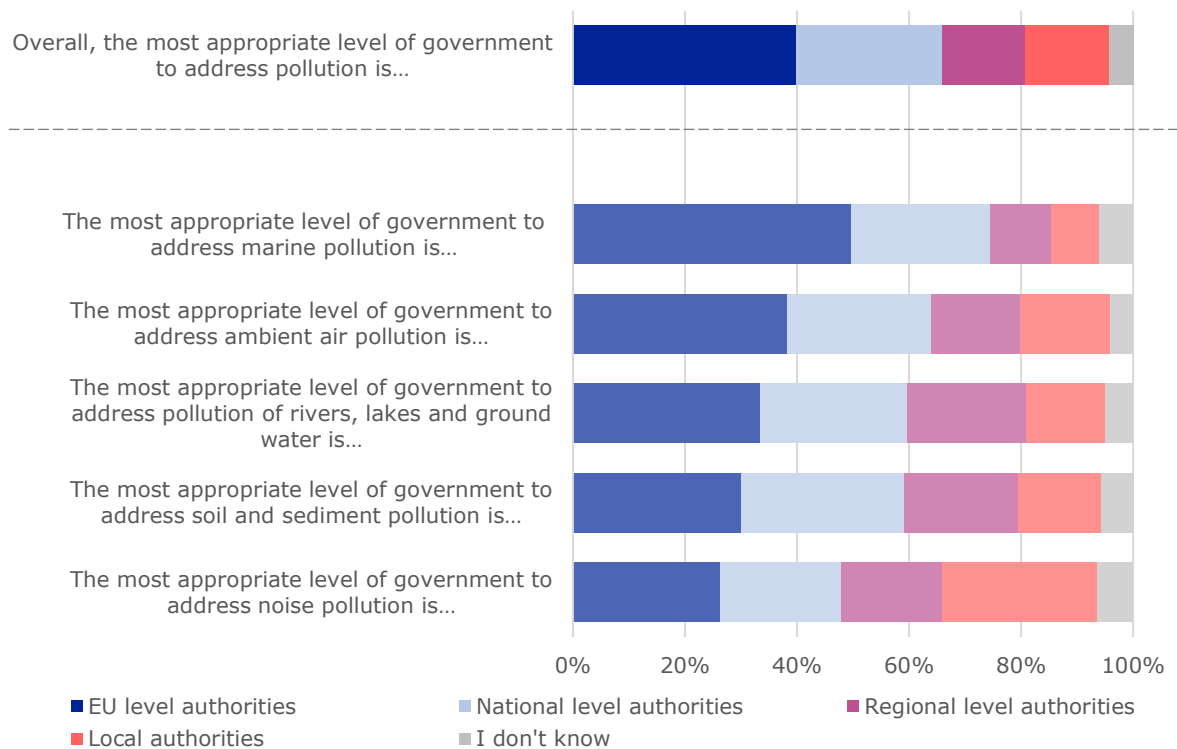
**Figure 10 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**



*n*= 706

In terms of the level of government most appropriate to address pollution in the EU Member States, 40% of the respondents consider EU level authorities to be the most appropriate, followed by 26% for national level authorities, and 15% each for regional and local authorities. EU-level authorities are considered as the most appropriate to address marine pollution (50%), ambient air pollution (38%), rivers, lakes and ground water pollution (33%), and soil and sediment pollution (30%). After EU-level authorities, respondents rank national level authorities as the second most appropriate to address the different types of pollution. The only exception is noise pollution, where 28% of the respondents consider local authorities to be the most appropriate, which is the highest share for this type of pollution.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 11 Which level of government is the most appropriate to address pollution in the EU Member States?**

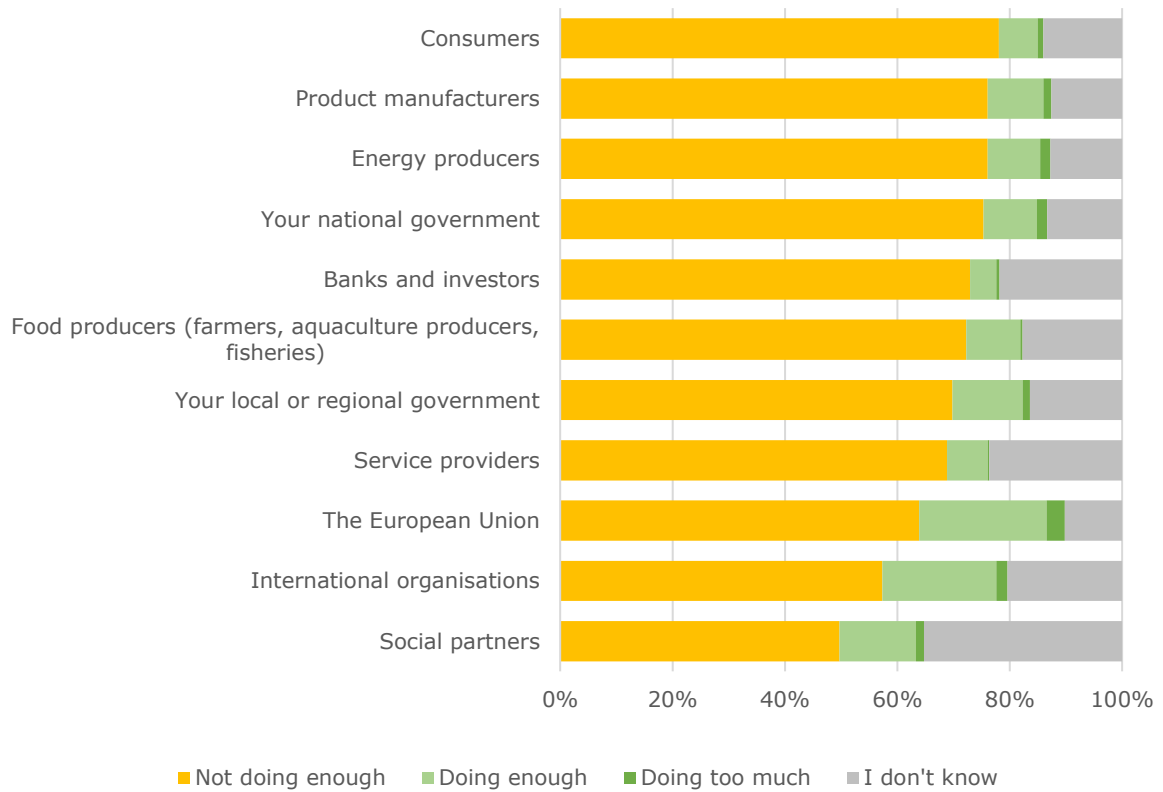


*Note: Multiple replies were possible*

<sup>7</sup> One association specified that they selected "I don't know" as they preferred not to take a position on the question asked.

More than half of the respondents (50% and above) agree that all actors listed are not yet doing enough to tackle pollution. Above all, 78% of the respondents state that consumers are not doing enough, followed by product manufacturers, energy producers (both 76%), and national governments (75%). At the other end, 23% of the respondents state that the European Union is doing enough about pollution, which is the highest share across the different categories.

**Figure 12 In your opinion, is each of the following currently doing too much, enough, or not enough about pollution?**

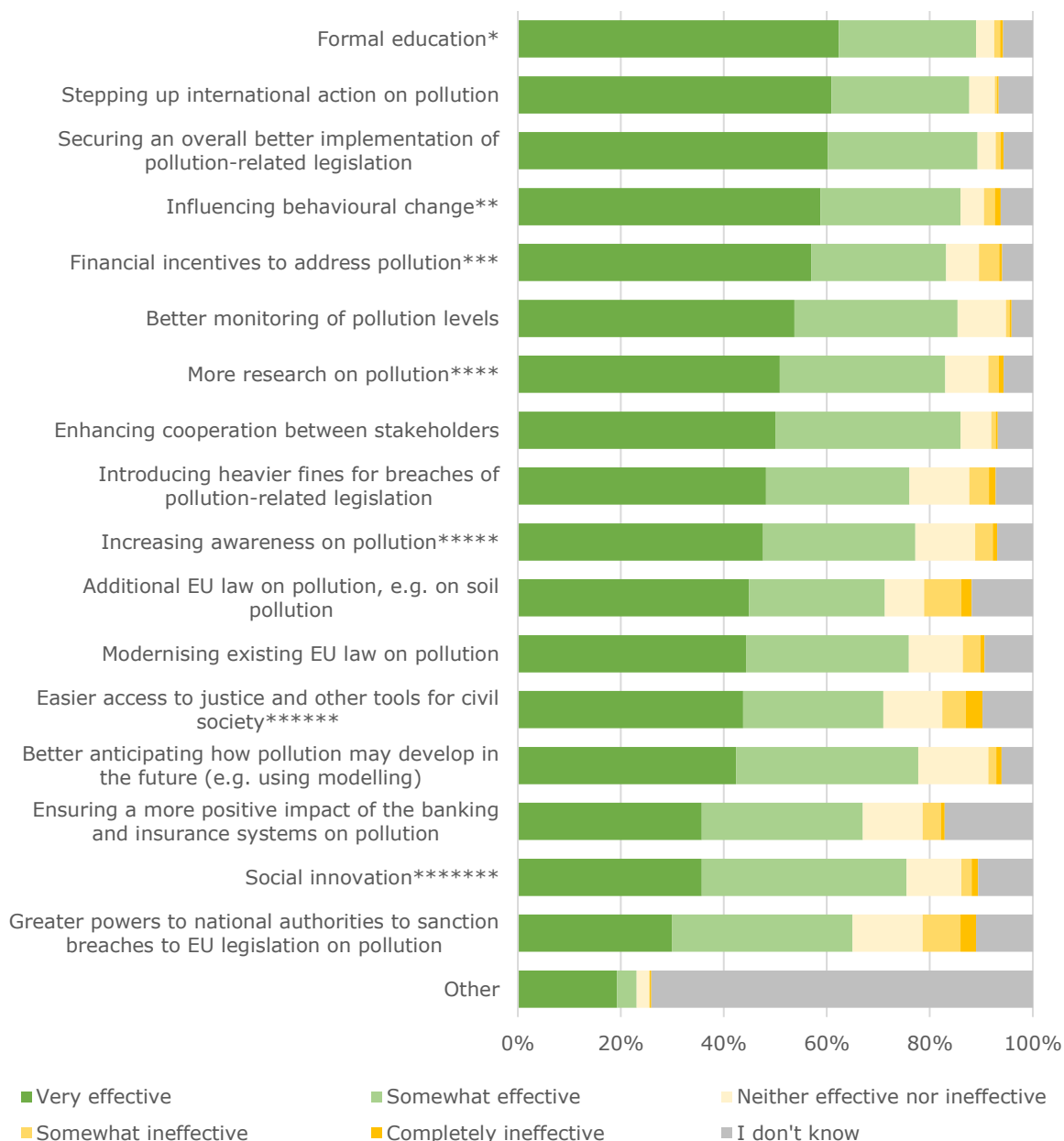


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The third section on *Ways forward to address pollution* focuses on ways to address the issue of pollution in the future.

Consistently, over 60% of the respondents completely or somewhat agree with the listed ways of tackling pollution. Formal education gains the biggest support with a 62% share of the respondents who completely agree, followed by stepping up international action on pollution (61%), and overall better implementation of pollution-related legislation (60%).

**Figure 13** In your opinion, how effective would the following ways of tackling pollution be?



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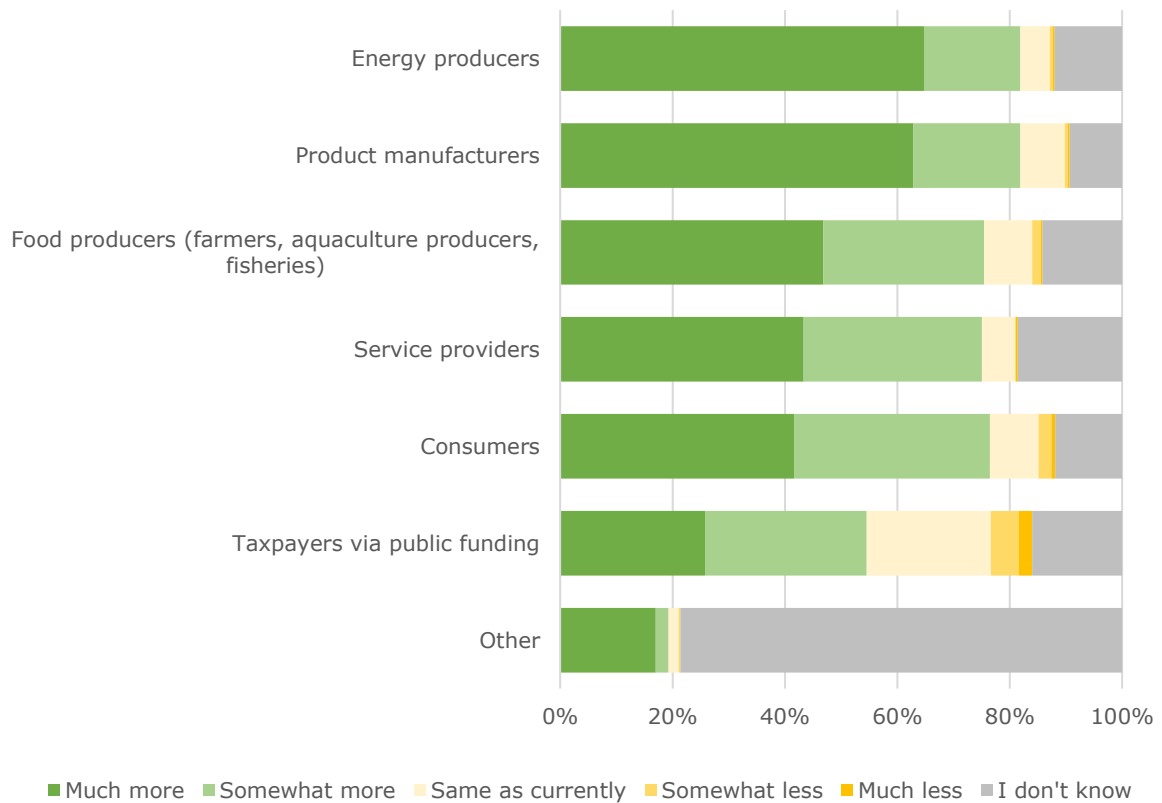
Shortened answer options:

\*Formal education: Integrating pollution-related issues more into education curricula, e.g. training activities on the interplay between pollution, climate change, and public health, on sustainable consumption of products and energy, on sustainable mobility; \*\*Influencing behavioural change (e.g. through social media, culture, sports,...) to shift to a 'zero pollution mentality', by informing citizens more, e.g. on the interplay between pollution, climate change and public health, on sustainable consumption of products and energy, on sustainable mobility; \*\*\*Financial incentives to address pollution (e.g. taxes and subsidies favouring less-

*polluting activities by industry and consumers); \*\*\*\*Increasing awareness on pollution, e.g. funding for clean-up/remediation activities with citizen involvement; \*\*\*\*\*Easier access to justice and other tools for civil society organisations to act against breaches to EU legislation on pollution; \*\*\*\*\*Social innovation (e.g. shifting from physical to digital solutions, changes in work organisation)*

Asked about how much different actors should contribute to reducing pollution, 65% of the respondents state that energy producers should contribute much more, followed by product manufacturers (63%), food producers (47%) service providers (43%), and consumers (42%). Less than a third of the respondents indicate that taxpayers via public funding (26%) and others (17%) should contribute much more. Only 2% of the respondents think taxpayers should do much less, which is the highest share across the different groups.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 14 In your view, how much should the following groups contribute (financially and by actions) to reducing pollution, compared to the current situation?**

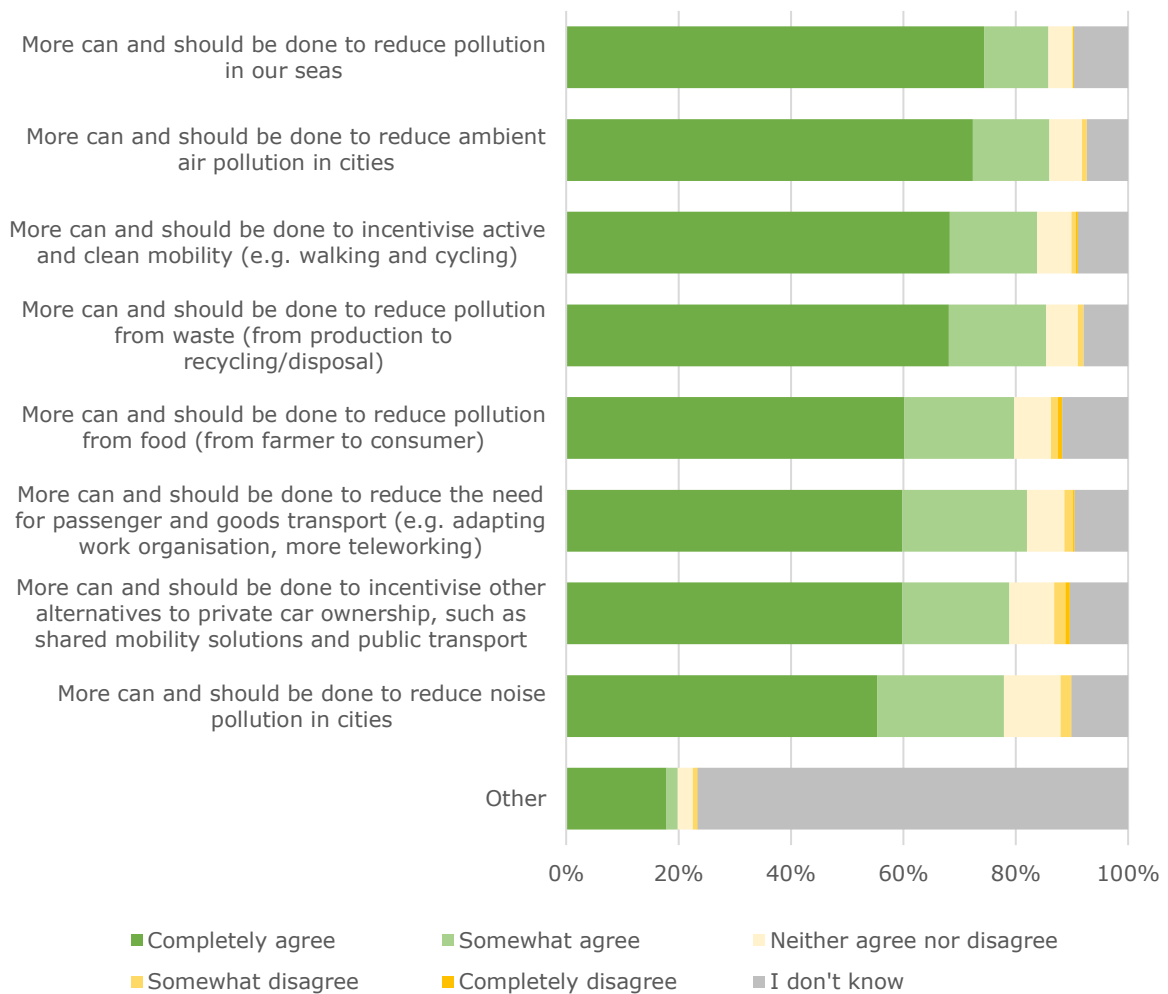


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<sup>8</sup> Five associations specified that they selected "I don't know" as they preferred not to take a position on the question asked.

With respect to the lessons that could be learned for zero pollution policies from recent developments, such as changes observed during COVID-19 related measures, 55% or more of the respondents completely agree with the listed statements. 74% of the respondents completely agree that more can and should be done to reduce pollution in our seas, followed by reducing ambient air pollution in cities (72%), incentivising active and clean mobility and reducing pollution from waste (both 68%). Respondents are the least sure about reducing noise pollution in cities, with 10% of the respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

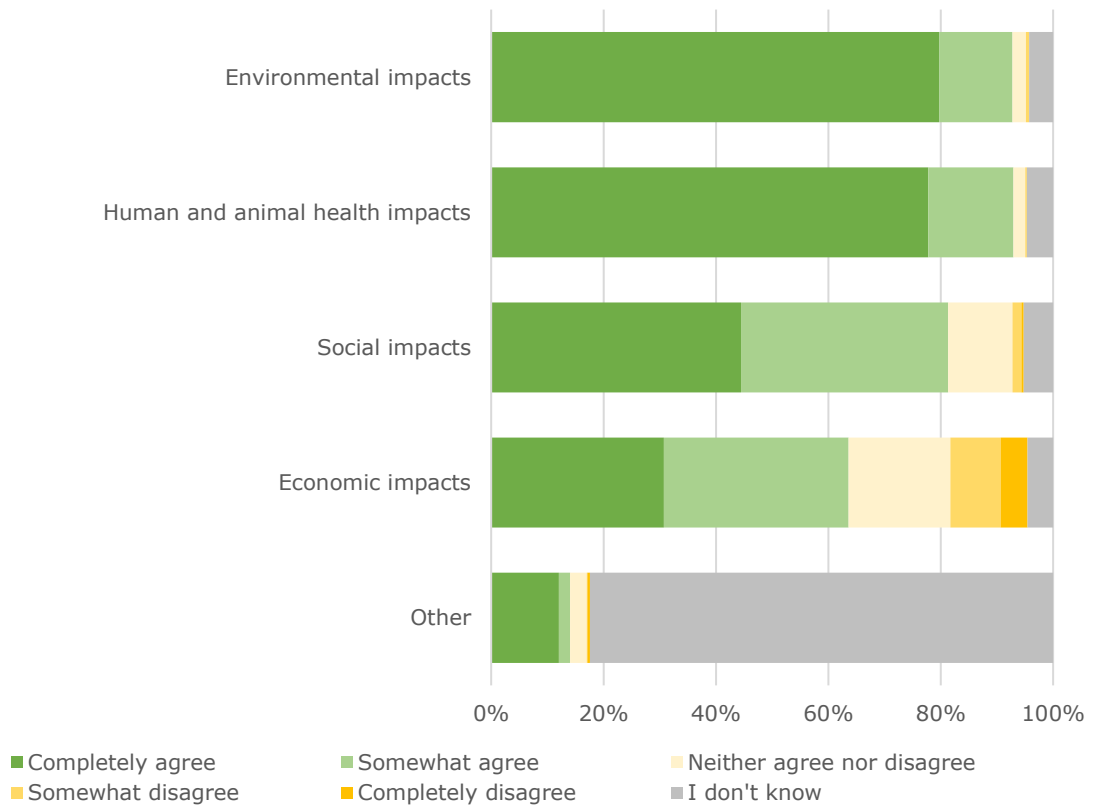
**Figure 15 In your view, which lessons could be learned for zero pollution policies from recent developments, such as changes observed during Covid-19 related measures (e.g. changes related to less commuting and traffic)?**



n= 706

With respect to the impacts that should be the most decisive for implementation of pollution related policies, 80% of the respondents completely agree that environmental impacts should be the most decisive, followed by human and animal health impacts (78%). Opinions diverge more when it comes to the economic impacts, but even there 31% of the respondents completely agree and 33% somewhat agree.

**Figure 16 In your view, what impacts should be the most decisive for implementation of pollution related policies?**



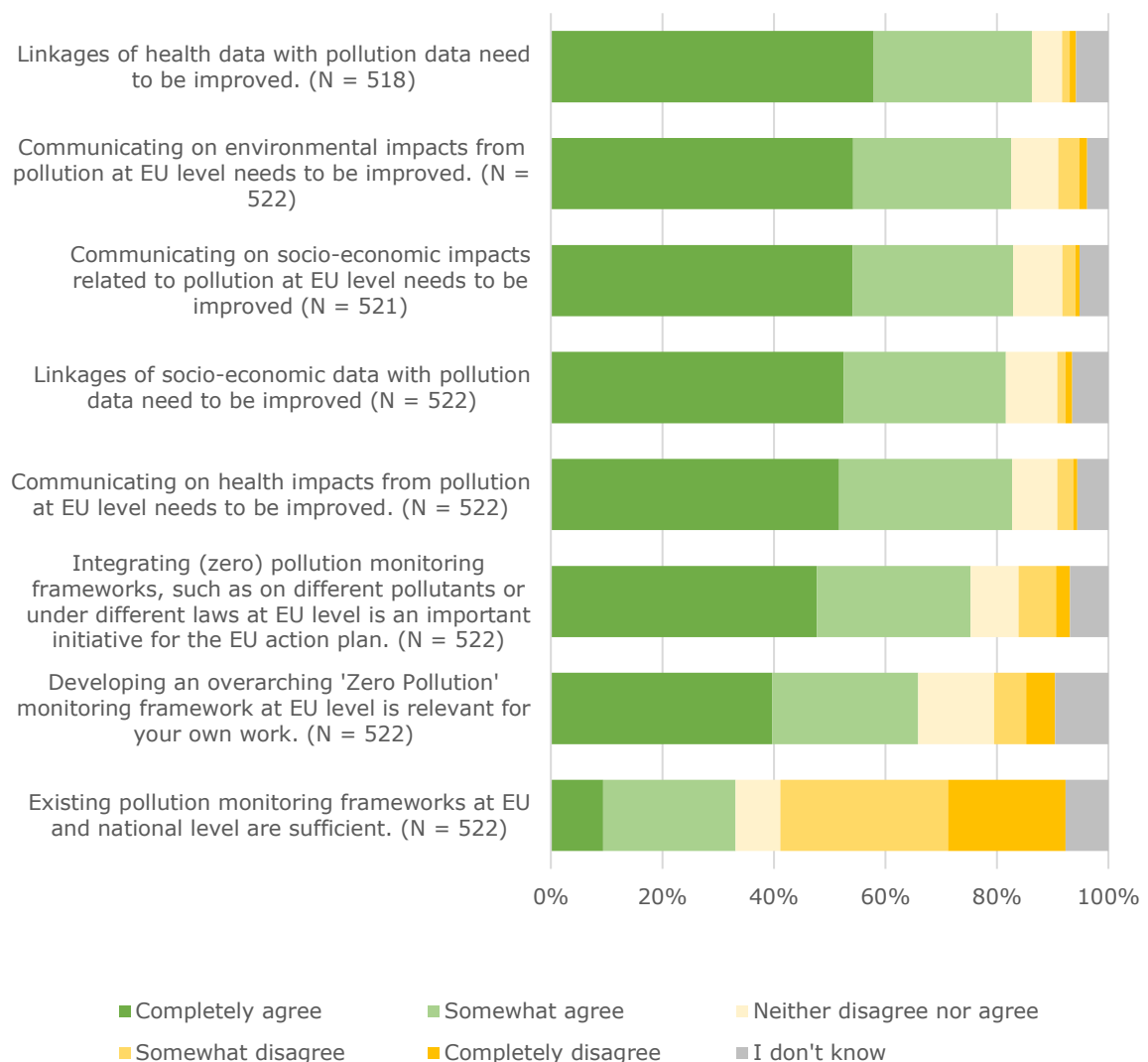
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Two additional sections seek input from experts and the specialised public (self-assessment). All questions were optional. The first of these two sections, *Towards an integrated zero pollution monitoring and outlook framework*, asks experts on their views on the development of a more integrated and holistic zero pollution monitoring and outlook framework.

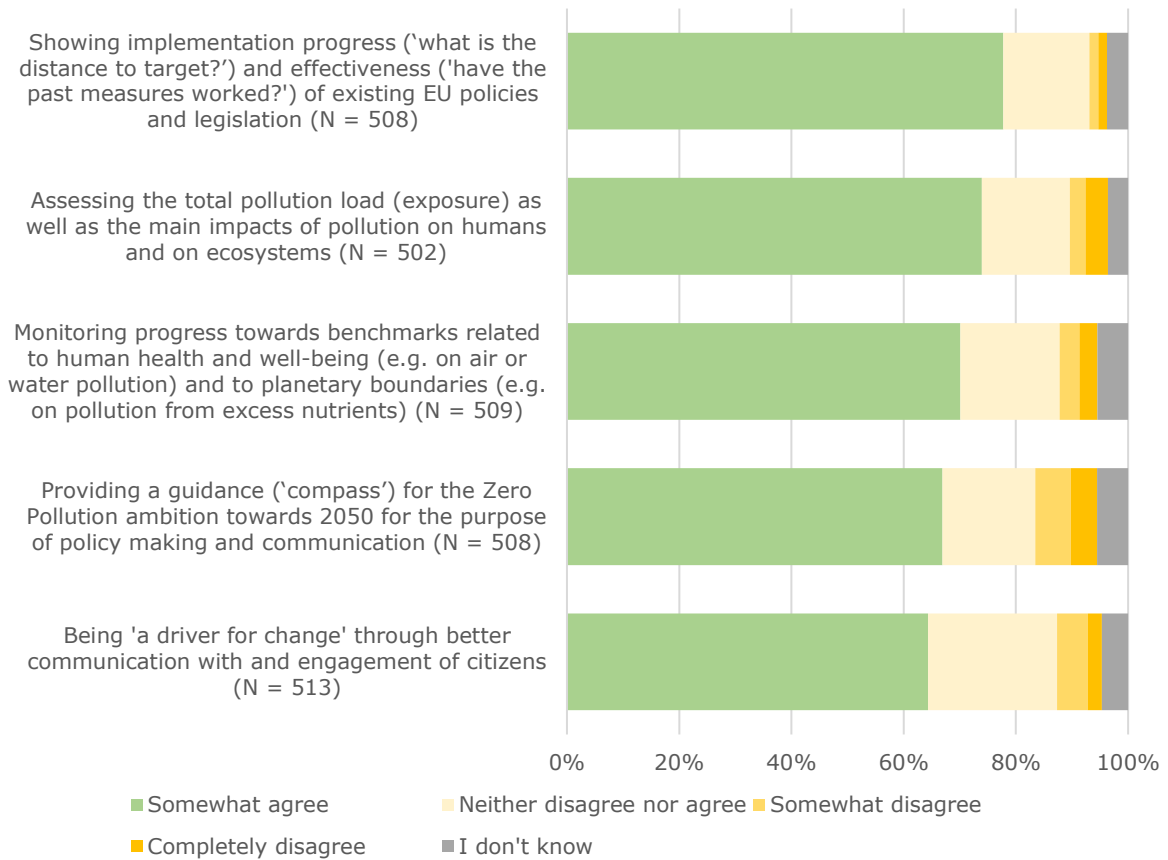
Overall, 40% or more of the respondents completely with the statements relating to necessary improvements in the application and management of pollution policies. 58% of the respondents completely agree that linkages between health data and pollution data need to improved, followed by communicating on environmental impacts from pollution at EU level and on socio-economic impacts related to pollution at the EU level (both 54%). Conversely, 21% completely disagree and 30% somewhat disagree that the existing monitoring frameworks for pollution at the EU and national level are sufficient.

**Figure 17 What is your opinion about the following statements?**



With respect to the opinions of respondents on the main purpose for a zero pollution monitoring and outlook at EU level, 64% or more somewhat agree with all of the suggested options.

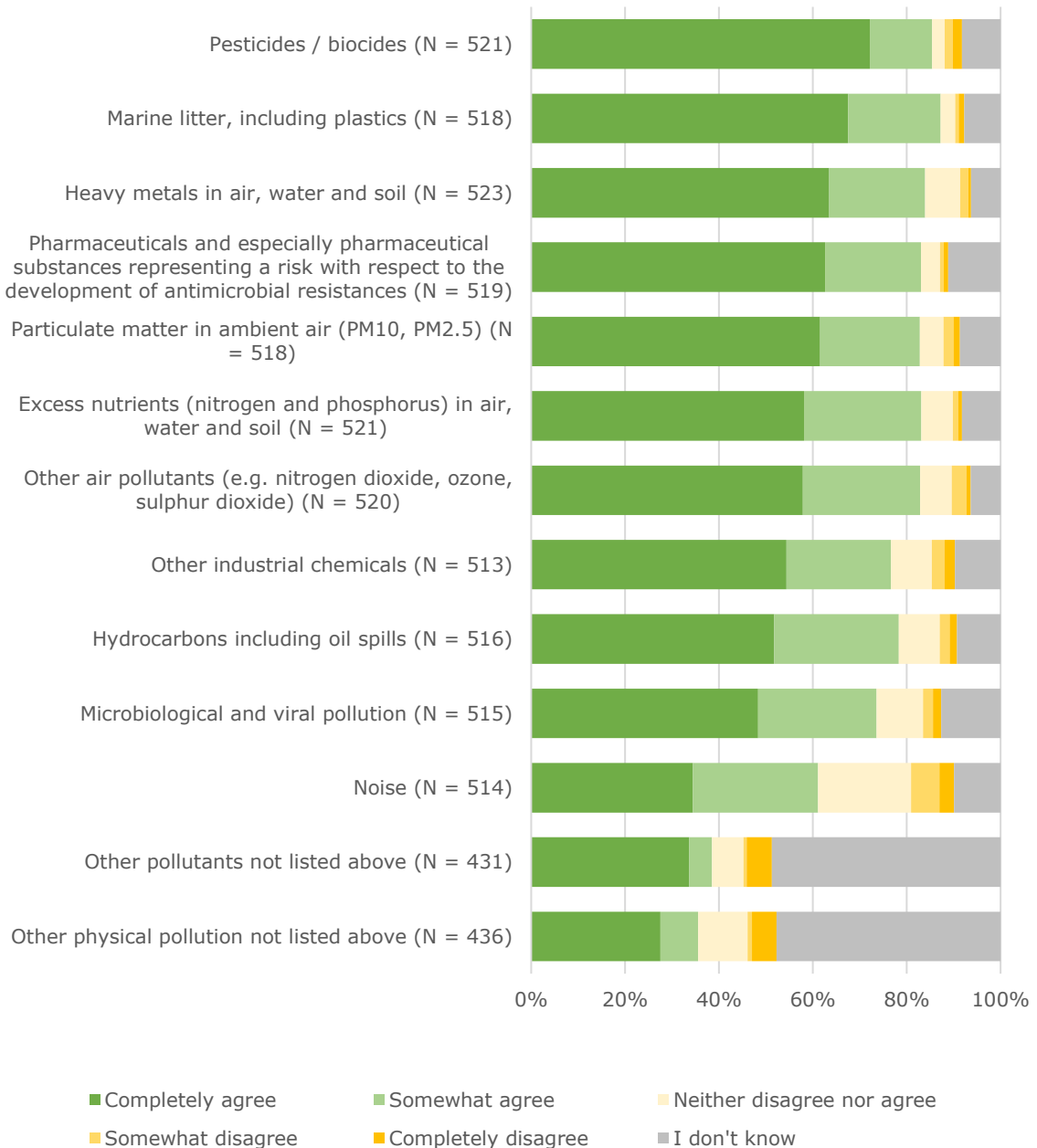
**Figure 18 In your opinion, what should be the main purpose for a zero pollution monitoring and outlook at EU level?**



*Note: There was no option "completely agree"*

With respect to the pollutants that should be addressed as a priority at EU level and therefore included in the monitoring framework, pesticides / biocides are ranked first with 72% of the respondents completely agreeing they should be addressed as a priority, followed by marine litter (68%), heavy metals (63%), pharmaceuticals (63%), and particulate matter (62%). Respondents are less certain about addressing noise as a priority, where 20% of the respondents neither disagree nor agree.

**Figure 19 In your opinion, which pollutants should be addressed as a priority at EU level and therefore included in the monitoring framework?**



The final section of the questionnaire explores *Digital solutions for zero pollution*, seeking to gather views of experts on the digital tools and services and how they can be used for achieving the zero pollution ambition.

36% of respondents completely agree with the statement that significant investment is needed in innovation and digitalisation to help achieve the 'zero pollution ambition, and that that digital solutions offer significant potential for reducing pollution (28%). Opinions diverge more when it comes to the use of digital tools by administrators to trace pollution and inform the public, where only 5% of the respondents completely agree and 12% completely disagree. Similarly, 12% of the respondents completely disagree with the statement that administrations are using digital tools to implement EU pollution legislation and enforce rules on the ground.

**Figure 20 What is your opinion about the following statements?**



Nearly half of the respondents (48%) completely agree that information about pollution for consumers and businesses is an area with high potential for pollution prevention, reduction and remediation. This is followed by data generation and monitoring of pollution (46%), data analytics and artificial intelligence (36%) and data transmission and management (33%). Based on the share of 'I don't know' responses, respondents are least sure about the potential of digital twins and models (42%), blockchain and distributed ledger technology (37%), and 3D printing or additive manufacturing (33%) as areas with a big potential for pollution prevention.

**Figure 21 In your opinion, what are the areas of digital application with the biggest potential for pollution prevention, reduction and remediation?**

