



Seeds of Growth

Capacity gaps and learning needs for Community Seed Banks and seed-saving practices in Europe

Strengthening Community Seed Banks and Sustainable Seed-Saving Practices in Europe

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Kick-off meeting of Seeds of Growth (Credit: Gabriele Maneo)



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About Seeds of Growth

Seeds of Growth: Strengthening Community Seed Banks and Sustainable Seed-Saving Practices in Europe is an Erasmus+ KA210-ADU project implemented by Semínkovna (Czech Republic), European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity! (EC-LLD, Belgium) and SEED (Luxembourg). The project runs over 16 months, from 01/09/2025 to 31/12/2026.

The project supports seed-saving practices and the development of Community Seed Banks (CSBs) as community-based structures that contribute to the conservation, sustainable use and circulation of locally adapted and diverse seeds across European food systems.

3 partners Semínkovna, EC-LLD and SEED bring national anchoring and European-level network connections.	16 months The project period runs from September 2025 to December 2026.
3 linked outputs CSB Labs, Seed Knowledge Hub and peer exchange activities are informed by this analysis.	1 practical purpose Use evidence on knowledge gaps, barriers and learning preferences to shape capacity-building support.

Why this analysis was done

The Capacity Gap Analysis maps current knowledge levels, learning priorities and participation barriers among seed savers, CSB managers, seed librarians, farmers, educators, researchers and other actors interested or involved in seed diversity, conservation and sustainable use.

Its **primary purpose** is to inform the project's subsequent capacity-building activities, particularly the CSB Labs training series, the open-access Seed Knowledge Hub and field-level exchange organised through Seeds of Growth (SoG). However, beyond the project's immediate outputs, the insights generated by this analysis also seek to contribute to the progressive professionalization of CSB-related practices by supporting clearer pathways from informal seed saving and exchange towards more structured, sustainable, and confident collective initiatives.

The survey suggests strong engagement from community seed-saving audiences in the two project focus countries (Czech Republic and Luxembourg), while also pointing to the importance of the project's EU-level dimension. A smaller "Other countries" group, while limited in size, includes a high concentration of experienced CSB managers and seed producers, representing a valuable pool of practical expertise that can strengthen training exchange and peer learning components. Results show strong interest in improving technical and operational practices, but also reveal important gaps related to CSB sustainability and management, and very low confidence navigating seed-sharing rules and regulations.

Key messages

The Capacity Gap Analysis highlights five key messages for the Seeds of Growth project and the wider seed community:

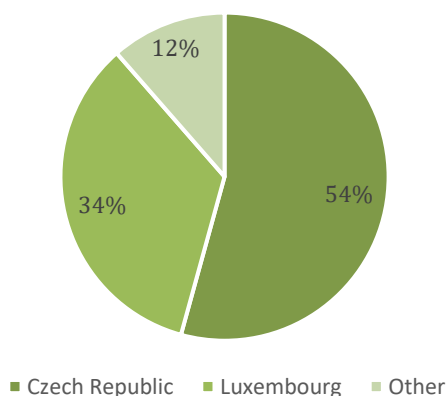
1. Many respondents are already active in seed saving and seed exchange. The main challenge is therefore not only to raise awareness, but to support the transition from individual or informal practice towards more reliable, documented and collective forms of seed stewardship.
2. The strongest capacity gaps are not only technical. Respondents show particularly low confidence in funding and sustainability, starting and managing Community Seed Banks, collaboration with research institutions, and understanding legal frameworks for seed sharing.
3. Legal uncertainty is a major barrier. Most respondents do not feel confident navigating seed-sharing rules and regulations, which supports the need for practical, accessible and non-technical guidance on what is possible, what requires caution, and where to look for further support.
4. Learning needs differ between country contexts. The Czech Republic shows strong latent demand and a broad community base, but limited experience with formal CSB management. Luxembourg shows a more balanced practice-oriented audience, while respondents from other European countries include a higher proportion of experienced CSB managers and seed producers.
5. A blended learning approach is well justified. Hands-on workshops, online courses, webinars, printed guides and peer-to-peer learning all received substantial interest, suggesting that the project should combine different formats rather than rely on one single training model.

Methodology snapshot

The Capacity Gap Analysis was conducted through an online survey of 19 questions, available in 4 languages (English, Czech, German, French), with an estimated completion time of 5–7 minutes. Data collection took place between October–December 2025, yielding 140 completed responses.

The survey was disseminated through partner networks, newsletters, social media channels, and seed-related community groups. Only completed questionnaires were retained for analysis. Several questions allowed multiple selections, so percentages reflect the share of respondents selecting each option rather than mutually exclusive categories.

Completed responses by geographical groups



Findings are presented at the overall level and disaggregated by geography into three groups: Czech Republic (n=76), Luxembourg (n=48), and Other European countries (n=16).

The distribution shows strong reach in the two focus countries, consistent with the project partners' national anchoring. Although the "Other countries" subgroup is smaller, it signals broader European interest and provides a relevant basis for peer exchange and EU-level knowledge sharing within the project.

The analysis is descriptive and based on completed survey responses. Several questions allowed multiple selections, so percentages show the share of respondents selecting each option.

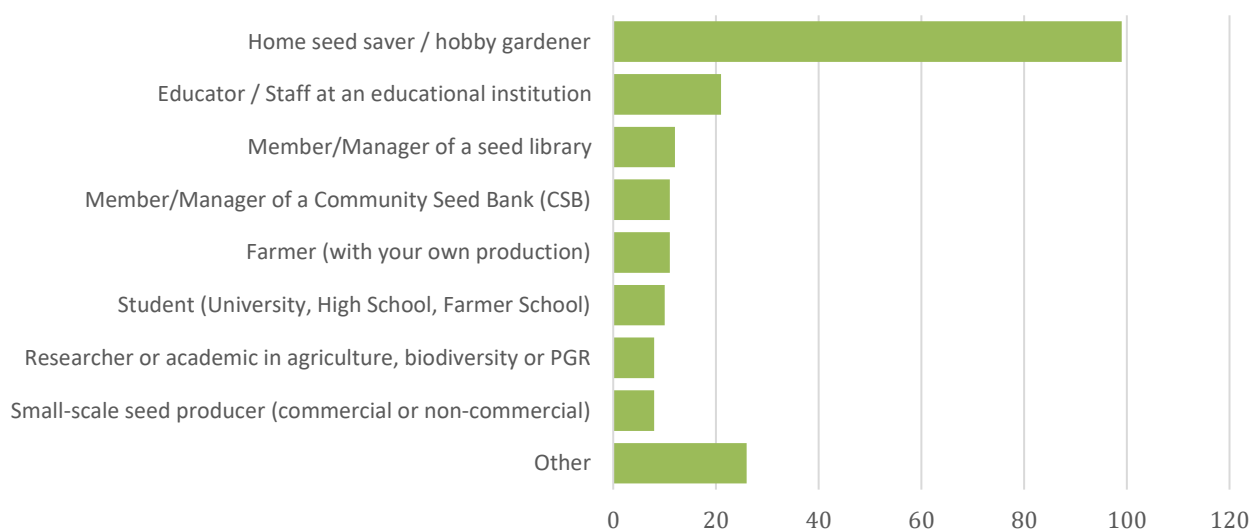
Seed Libraries and Community Seed Banks

In this report, the term *seed library* refers mainly to accessible community-based places or initiatives where people can share, exchange or obtain seeds, often with an educational and awareness-raising purpose. Seed libraries can be hosted by libraries, schools, community centres, associations or informal groups. The term *Community Seed Bank* refers to a more structured collective initiative focused on the conservation, regeneration, documentation and circulation of seeds, often with stronger attention to seed quality, origin, storage, governance and long-term sustainability. In practice, the two models can overlap. A seed library can become a first step towards a more structured Community Seed Bank, and both play an important role in strengthening seed diversity, community engagement and seed-saving knowledge.

Who responded?

The survey mainly reached a practice-oriented audience. Home seed savers and hobby gardeners represent the largest group, confirming a stronger engagement with entry-level and community practice audiences. Smaller but relevant segments include educators, seed library members or managers, farmers, CSB members or managers, students, researchers and small-scale seed producers.

Respondent roles (n)



Three respondent landscapes

The three geographic groups show different respondent profiles. These differences matter because they point to different learning needs and different opportunities for peer exchange within the project.

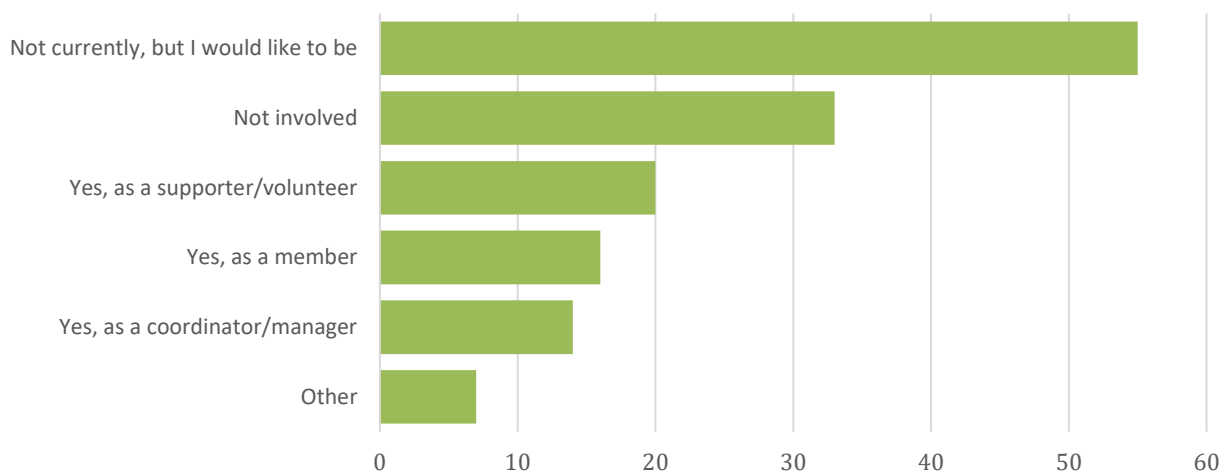
Czech Republic	Luxembourg	Other countries
Strong hobby seed saver base; visible education-facing segment; highest latent demand for involvement; very limited CSB management experience.	Similar hobby and practice profile; more mixed and less clearly categorised roles; more balanced involvement and participation; strong preference for practical learning.	Smaller group, but more specialised; high share of CSB managers and seed producers; stronger operational and regulatory experience; valuable source of peer learning.

The “Other countries” group is smaller and should not be over-generalised, but it contains a higher share of experienced practitioners. This makes it useful as a potential source of case examples, practice reflections and peer learning inputs.

Interest is high, but involvement remains limited

The largest group of respondents is not currently involved in a Community Seed Bank or seed library, but would like to be. This suggests substantial potential demand for introductory guidance and pathways into participation. At the same time, the survey includes an active core of supporters, volunteers, members and coordinators or managers.

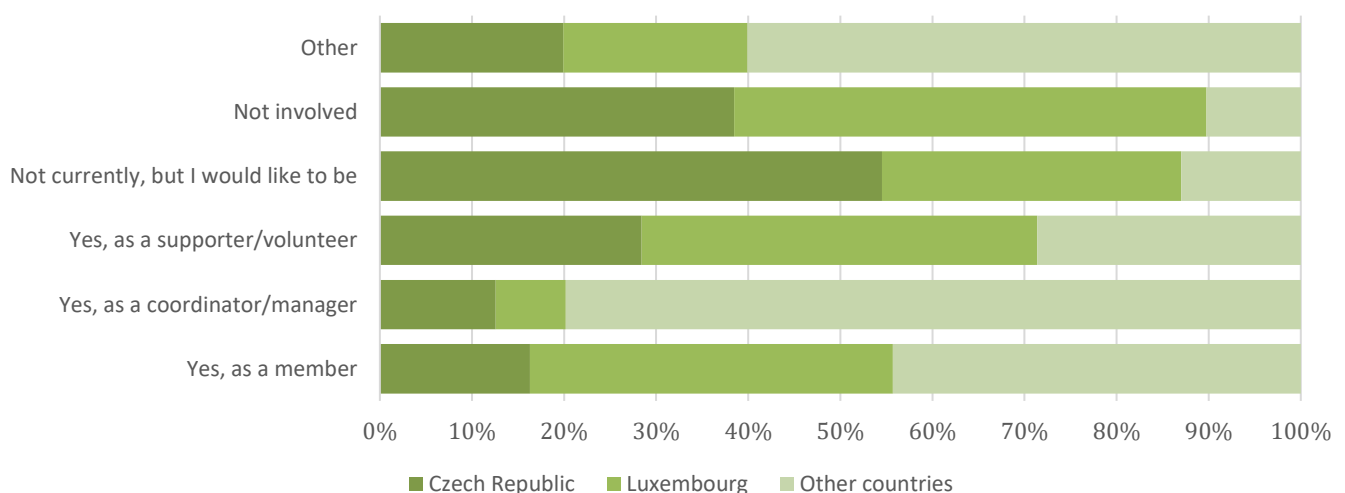
Involvement in CSB and Seed Libraries



Country patterns of involvement

Involvement patterns differ across country groups. The Czech Republic shows the strongest latent demand. Luxembourg shows a more balanced mix of non-involvement, interest, membership and volunteering. The “Other countries” group is more leadership-heavy, contributing a disproportionate share of coordinators/managers despite the smaller sample.

Involvement by Country (% of respondents)

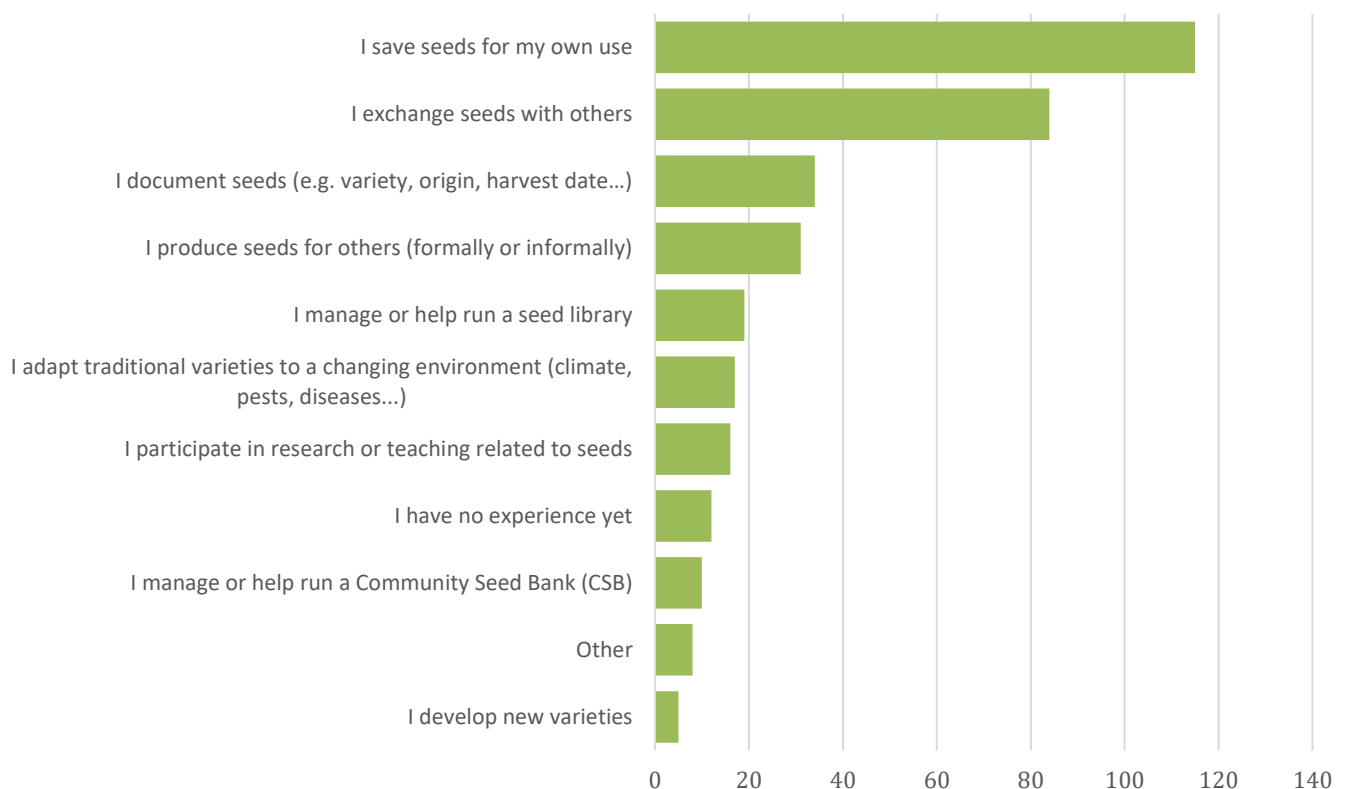


The findings point to differentiated engagement needs across country groups. In the Czech Republic, the priority is to convert strong latent interest into participation through clear entry points and accessible orientation. In Luxembourg, the focus should be on strengthening pathways from membership and volunteering toward more sustained engagement. Respondents from other countries, although fewer in number, represent a valuable peer-learning resource because they include a higher share of people already involved in CSB or seed library coordination.

Seed-saving practice is already widespread

Respondents most frequently report saving seeds for their own use and exchanging seeds with others. This confirms a strong baseline of active seed-saving practice at household and community levels. More structured stewardship practices are present but less common, including documentation, producing seeds for others and managing seed libraries or CSBs.

Experience with seeds and seed saving



The findings suggest that the project should not treat the audience as beginners with no practical experience. A more useful framing is to support the transition from individual or informal practice toward more reliable, documented and collective forms of seed stewardship.

The main capacity gap

Self-rated knowledge shows a clear gap between technical seed-saving practice and the capacities needed to establish and sustain more structured practices and Community Seed Banks. The lowest confidence areas are funding and sustainability, starting and managing a CSB, and collaboration with research or academic institutions.

Knowledge area	1 (None)	2	3	4	5 (Advanced)
Funding and sustainability of CSBs	66%	10%	12%	4%	9%
Starting and managing a CSB	63%	15%	15%	6%	2%
Collaboration with research or academic institutions	59%	14%	10%	8%	9%
Understanding legal frameworks for seed sharing	42%	19%	21%	11%	7%
Seed stock management (tracking, viability testing, labelling)	33%	23%	29%	9%	6%
Community involvement and organising seed exchanges	33%	20%	22%	11%	13%
Techniques for seed conservation (drying, storage, regeneration)	17%	27%	30%	13%	14%

By contrast, respondents report comparatively stronger knowledge in techniques for seed conservation and community involvement or organising seed exchanges.

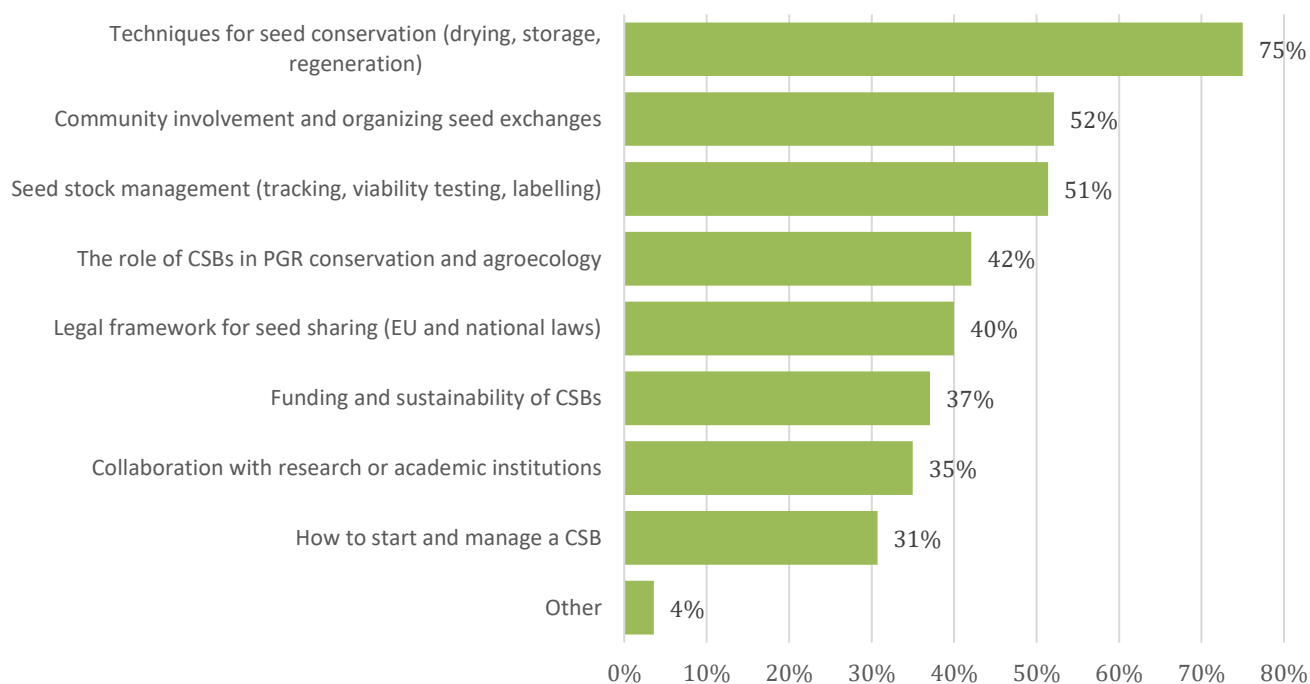
Czech Republic and Luxembourg show consistently low confidence in CSB governance and sustainability. The "Other countries" group reports higher competence across most areas, consistent with its CSB-manager profile.

This suggests a capacity-building offer that combines practical and more advanced seed stewardship practices with standards, documentation and management support.

What people want to learn

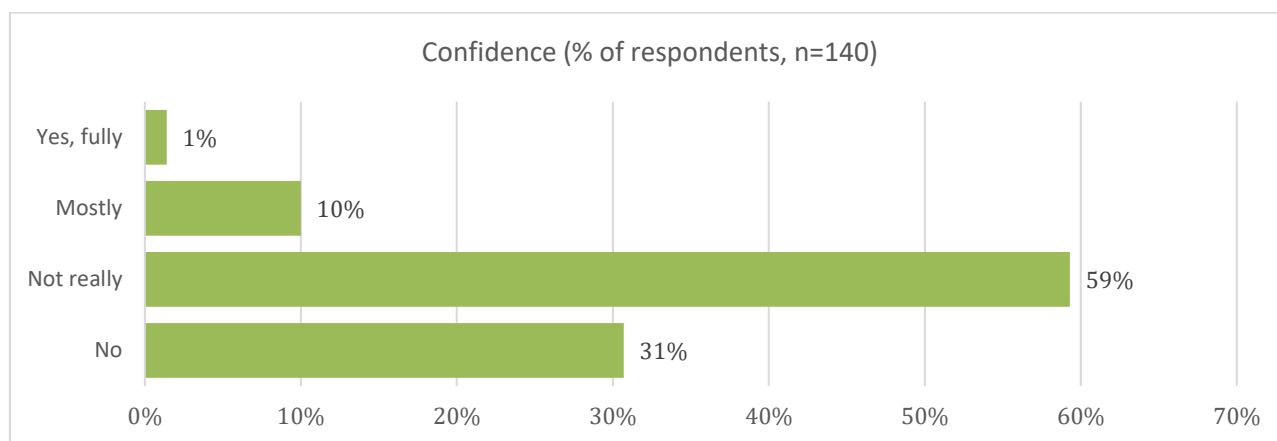
Learning interests are strongly practice-oriented. Despite the higher level of knowledge reported on seed saving practices, the most requested topic is techniques for seed conservation, followed by community involvement and organising seed exchanges, and seed stock management. At the same time, respondents also show meaningful interest in the role of CSBs in plant genetic resources conservation and agroecology, legal frameworks, funding and sustainability, and research collaboration.

One pattern worth noting is that only 30.7% select "how to start and manage a CSB" as a learning interest, despite this being one of the largest self-rated knowledge gaps. This suggests that governance and sustainability needs may be under-recognized, or perceived as relevant only by those in coordination roles.

Learning interests (% of respondents, n=140)

A major enabling gap: seed-sharing rules

Confidence navigating seed-sharing rules and regulations is very low across the sample. Most respondents report that they are either not really confident or not confident at all. Only a small minority report being fully or mostly confident.



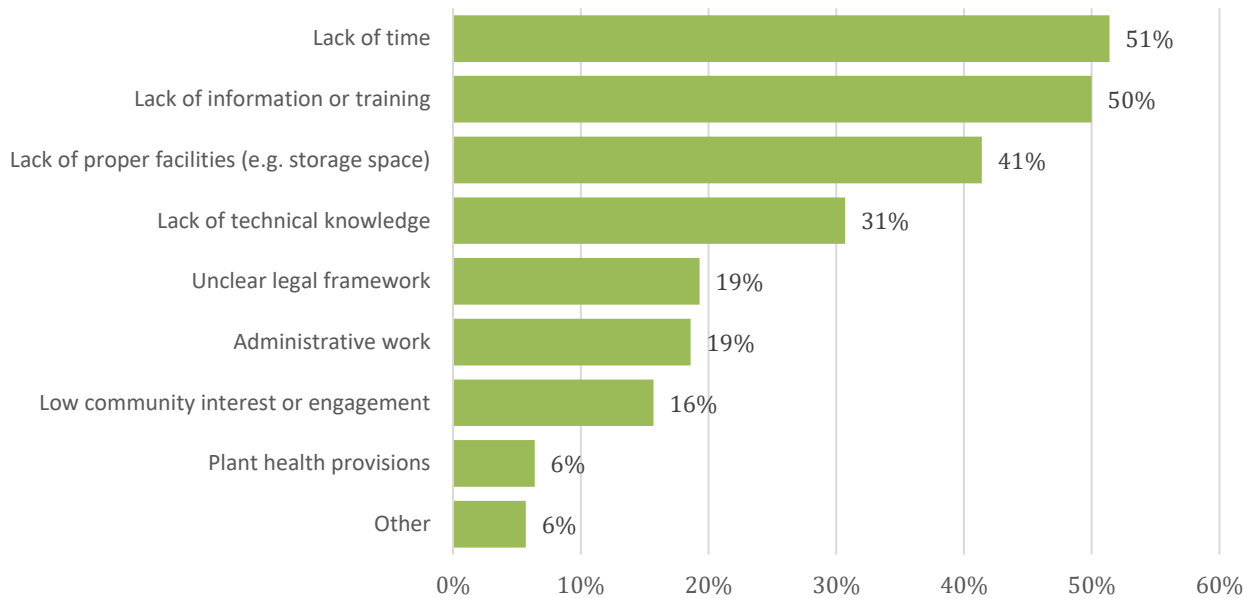
Open-ended responses reinforce this: many participants lack clarity on seed exchange versus distribution, seed health requirements, and national interpretations of EU rules. Czech Republic and Luxembourg both exceed 90% low confidence. The "Other countries" group includes more practitioners selecting "mostly confident" (37.5%), but overall uncertainty remains.

As informal seed-saving activities become more structured, uncertainty about what is permitted in practice can become a barrier to participation, coordination and responsible seed circulation.

What's holding people back

The main barriers to stronger engagement are lack of time, lack of information or training, and lack of proper facilities. Respondents also identify technical knowledge, unclear legal frameworks, administrative work and community engagement as constraints.

Barriers to involvement (% of respondents, n=140)

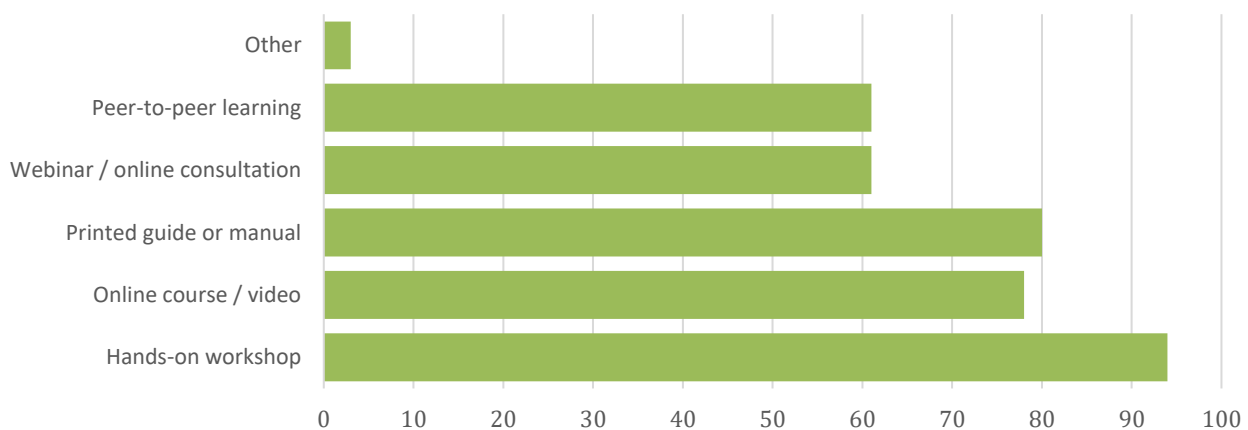


In Czech Republic, lack of information or training leads (55.3%), while Luxembourg emphasizes lack of technical knowledge (39.6%). In "Other countries," barriers shift toward enabling conditions: administrative burden, plant health provisions, and community engagement.

How they want to learn

Preferred support formats are distributed across several options. Hands-on workshops are the most selected format, but printed guides, online courses or videos, webinars and peer-to-peer learning also receive substantial support. A single format would therefore be less responsive than a blended learning offer.

Learning method preferences



Overall, respondents express **strong interest in continued engagement** with Seeds of Growth activities. Most respondents indicate that they would **definitely** like to stay informed about trainings, field trips, and the broader network (77.5%), while a further 20.0% select “Maybe.” Only a very small minority (2.5%) do not wish to receive updates. This suggests that the survey reached an audience that is not only engaged in seed saving and related practices, but also receptive to ongoing communication and future opportunities through the Seeds of Growth initiative.

What this means for Seeds of Growth

The findings validate the project’s planned blended delivery model and help clarify where each project component can add value. The project can respond to both immediate practical interests and deeper enabling gaps related to CSB establishment, seed quality and regulatory orientation.

1 Confirm the blended delivery model

The findings support combining recorded webinars, a structured resource repository, and peer exchange through field visits. Recorded webinars respond to the two most common barriers — lack of time and lack of training — while matching strong interest in online formats. The Seed Knowledge Hub responds to demand for reusable materials. Field visits respond to the high preference for hands-on learning, especially in Luxembourg.

2 Use EU-level participation strategically

Although smaller in number, respondents from “Other countries” include a high proportion of CSB managers and seed producers, and report higher competence in several operational and enabling areas. Where feasible, the project can strengthen learning quality by creating space for these actors to contribute short inputs, case examples, or practice reflections during webinars and exchanges. This reinforces the EU-level knowledge-sharing ambition without requiring additional training tracks.

3 Frame the CSB Labs around three priority topics

The survey validates the relevance of the three planned CSB Labs:

- CSB establishment and management: directly addresses the strongest gaps in sustainability and governance, and supports respondents who want to engage but lack entry points or practical knowledge of CSB models.
- Seed health and quality: builds on strong demand for conservation and seed stock management, helping participants consolidate good practice and improve reliability for sharing and community use.
- Seed policy and legal frameworks: responds to very low regulatory confidence, with a focus on clarity, practical implications, and how to navigate rules in real-life situations rather than technical legal expertise.

4 Prioritise engagement and outreach to convert interest into participation

The high level of latent demand — especially in the Czech Republic, where 38 respondents want to join but are not yet involved — suggests a need for clear, accessible outreach and entry points. Communications should focus on: simple explanations of CSBs and how they work; clear pathways to join activities or communities; regular follow-up communication (given strong interest in staying informed); and terminology clarity between CSBs, seed libraries, and exchange groups.

What this means for the wider seed community

The findings are relevant beyond Seeds of Growth. They point to broader pathways for organisations, networks and educators working to strengthen seed stewardship, Community Seed Banks and community seed initiatives in Europe.

Build on existing practice Many actors already save and exchange seed. Support should improve reliability, organisation and confidence rather than assume that awareness is absent.	Support structured initiatives There is a need for pathways that help people move from household seed saving and informal exchange toward sustainable collective initiatives.
Combine technical and enabling support Practical seed stewardship matters, but wider support also needs to address funding, governance, collaboration and legal orientation.	Use mixed learning models Hands-on training, reusable resources, online materials and peer exchange are complementary and should be designed as a coherent learning ecosystem.

For wider organisations and networks, this means designing support that recognises the diversity of actors involved: informal seed savers, educators, community gardeners, seed librarians, CSB managers, farmers, researchers and small-scale seed producers. Different actors may need different entry points, but all benefit from clear pathways and opportunities to learn from practice to support more structured, professional and connected seed saving practices.

Looking ahead

The findings of this Capacity Gap Analysis will directly inform the next phase of the Seeds of Growth project. Three CSB Labs structured around CSB establishment and management, seed health and quality, and seed policy, will be delivered as recorded webinars complemented by practical resources. The Seed Knowledge Hub will provide an open-access repository of guides, templates, and reference materials organised around practice, community, and policy themes. Peer exchange visits will offer participants hands-on exposure to operational models in different contexts.

Partners

- Semínková (Czech Republic) A community seed bank and seed-saving initiative based in the Czech Republic, working to conserve and share locally adapted seed varieties.
- European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity! (EC-LLD) (Belgium). A European network bringing together organisations and networks working on seed and cultivated diversity.
- SEED (Luxembourg). A seed-saving and agroecology initiative based in Luxembourg, promoting local seed networks, community exchanges, and practical seed stewardship.