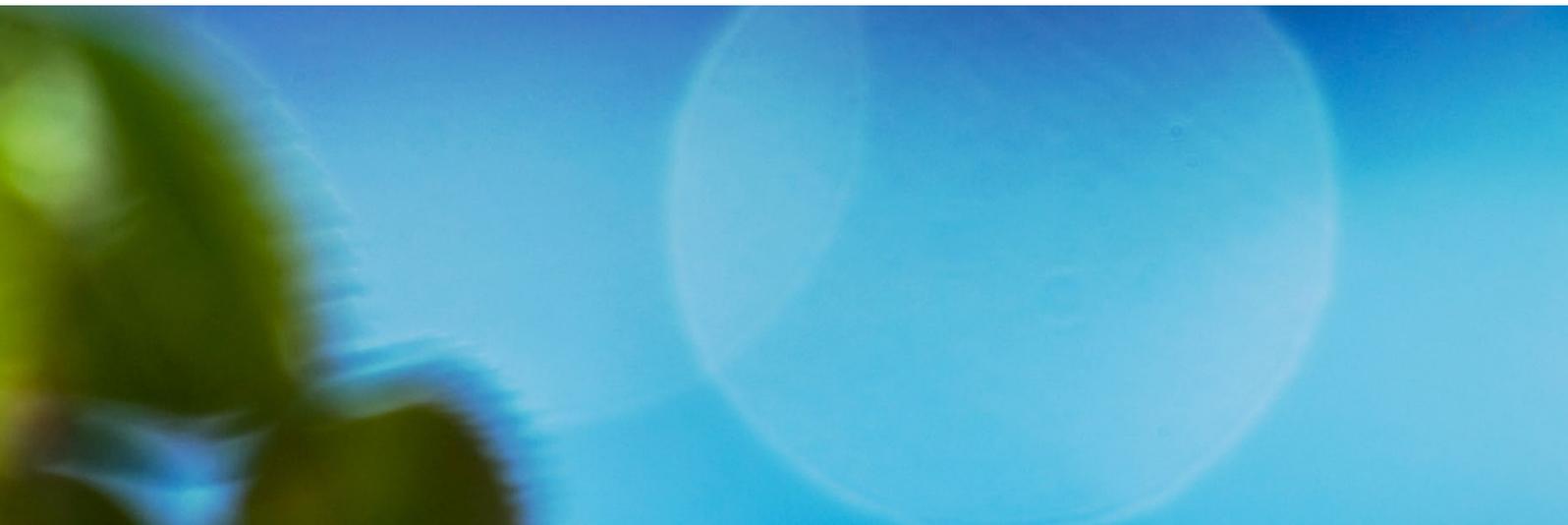


European forest governance post-2020



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A new era of forest policy-making

Europe and the EU will face a significant new era of forest policy-making after 2020. A strategic and coordinated policy direction will be required, not least to support the implementation of globally agreed policy targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement and Convention on Biological Diversity. In the global policy arena, trade developments related e.g. to China, Russia and North America will also have important implications for the European forest sector. On a pan-European scale, a decision on whether to start negotiations on a legally binding agreement on forests in Europe under the umbrella of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) will have to be taken in 2020.

Forest products and services are increasingly an inherent and integrated element of many other sectors, ranging from energy to food production to conservation and public health. This wide range of sectors and multiple interests, at different levels, leads to a complex multi-sectoral governance system. For example, within the EU, negotiations are currently ongoing on post-2020 EU policies on agriculture and rural development, biodiversity, climate, industry, food security, circular economy and new legislation on sustainable finance. All of them will have an important influence on forest-related decision-making processes. In addition, the European Green Deal launched in December 2019, will affect forest-related policies in the coming decade.

Forests are the biggest land-based natural resource in Europe and there are increasing demands to use this resource for many different purposes. Climate change and biodiversity have become major drivers of all environmental questions, with high expectations for European forests to contribute. The European bioeconomy also has many opportunities and demands for forests, which can play a major role in phasing-out fossil raw materials and products,

generating income and employment, and as a provider of ecosystem services to an increasingly urbanized and ageing society. Clearly, this generates potential synergies and trade-offs between the different needs for forests, which all have to be dealt with in a context of a complex inter-sectoral policy landscape that also operates at regional, national and supra-national levels.

This report reviews significant developments in the forest governance framework including EU and international developments, and discusses how coordination in other policy areas than forests leads to policy integration. Based on evidence from a literature review, stakeholder interviews and workshop results, it outlines several potential pathways for future forest policy-making in Europe.

Policy implications

- **To increase EU forest policy coordination, the integration between EU and Member States (vertical integration) and of separate EU policy objectives (horizontal integration) has to be defined and developed.** Future interaction between public (government) and private initiatives forms a third mode. In practice, integration may take hybrid forms across the three levels, including forest agenda-setting, cooperation and coordination across different levels, sectoral and cross-sectoral coalitions as well as the provision of proper financial and human resourcing for targeted forest policy integration.
- **The forest sector should increase cross-sectoral policy initiatives and become a strategic player in addressing the role of forests and forest resources for the future EU society and economy.** It has to become proactive rather than reactive in addressing major EU policy goals, which often arise from global challenges and from outside the forest sector. This would allow a more rapid and coordinated response to emerging issues, and help articulate

national forest-related policy goals in the EU framework more clearly. It would require a common political vision, or at least an agreement on the main political priorities for forests and forest resources.

- **The major challenges for EU forest policy-making are linked to several policy domains, and will require new modes of cooperative forest governance and processes.** This may include new forms of dialogue, information exchange, and cross-sectoral initiatives including the discussion of synergies and trade-offs on an EU level. Existing forms of forest governance have shown limitations in moving towards better coordination and integration. To balance the major socio-economic and environmental demands on forests, while maintaining the competitiveness of the sector in an economy moving towards low carbon and renewable resources, it is also important that forest-related interests are integrated into other EU policy domains. This requires consistent and coordinated policy goals and targets on forests, and active handling of synergies and trade-offs.
- **Experiences from other policy domains show that policy integration is typically incremental and path-dependent.** Radical changes are often not successful and may in fact counteract ambitious goals for deeper integration. Attempts to strengthen cross-sectoral integration in these policy domains often remain largely symbolic, hence altering existing policy frameworks or even introducing new instruments and practices would require extraordinary political and/or external pressures.
- **The forest sector and its product markets differ from the heavily subsidised EU agricultural markets, and might require fewer resources for fostering policy integration.** However, the integration challenge is to support and boost non-market forest ecosystem services, such as biodiversity, climate mitigation, recreation services, etc., and to ensure ecosystem services provision without impeding the functioning of existing forest products markets. It is also important that new policies do not lead to the offsetting of EU climate and environmental goals in other regions, with sustainability leakages like carbon leakages, illegal logging and biodiversity loss.
- **A major divide as to whether forests should serve mainly environmental or economic forestry objectives was found in previous studies and confirmed by a new interview series** with representatives from Member States, stakeholders and EU-level administrators. While the results show largely well-known interest coalitions with regard to EU forest policy (e.g. conservation vs. commodity interests, forest-rich producer vs. forest-poor consumer states), new configurations also occur depending on the topic.
- **Defining joint topics on forests might be key to fostering forest policy integration.** Currently (in parallel with the Green Deal proposal), bioeconomy, climate change and biodiversity protection could serve as such. It will be important to demonstrate the realistic potential contribution of forests, and to further develop the concept of sustainable forest management as the major coherent and comprehensive element that forests and the forest-based sector can bring into different policy processes such as the Green Deal.
- **The European Green Deal puts the forest-based sector in a key position in climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection, and it is therefore important to trigger stronger forest policy integration and strengthen its implementation.** However, more resources for forest expertise in the European Commission services and national administrations will be needed to ensure that the integration of distinct forest demands can be properly addressed. The Green Deal proposal puts a strong focus on biodiversity conservation and the carbon storage function of forests, but hardly mentions (forest) bioeconomy at all. This has led to significant concerns regarding the need to also strengthen the transition to a **circular bioeconomy**, to advance EU policy objectives and sustainability in all dimensions. It is important to clarify how different forest-related policy objectives can be met, and to develop governance mechanisms that take into full account the entire set of ecosystem services that forests provide, including the global dimension.



- **The development of future forest policy in Europe post-2020 requires consistent policy-making on and across all levels of governance.** The way forests are dealt with on different levels (international, EU, national) requires better inter- and intra-governmental coordination (e.g. between forestry and nature authorities). Apart from global and EU processes, the future of the **FOREST EUROPE process** and the developments around a Legally Binding Agreement are expected to influence how forestry topics will be shaped in Europe

in the future. It is important to define what forest policy integration means along the different possible future pathways, and which elements of integration are potential priorities. The debate on the future of EU forests and what services are required from them has often been strongly ideological in the past. Using evidence-based information and seeking practical means to **maximize synergies and minimize trade-offs** between the different needs for forests would give a better basis for future forest policy development.

We are living in a time of accelerated changes and unprecedented global challenges: energy security, natural resource scarcity, biodiversity loss, fossil-resource dependence and climate change. Yet the challenges also demand new solutions and offer new opportunities. The cross-cutting nature of forests and the forest-based sector provides a strong basis to address these interconnected societal challenges, while supporting the development of a European circular bioeconomy.

The European Forest Institute is an unbiased, science-based international organisation that provides the best forest science knowledge and information for better informed policy making. EFI provides support for decision-takers, policy makers and institutions, bringing together cross-boundary scientific knowledge and expertise to strengthen science-policy dialogue.

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