



EUROPEAN FOREST  
INSTITUTE

# *Annual Report* **2021**







# 2021:

evolution and action



# Foreword

**T**he need for post-Covid economic recovery in 2021 provided a good opportunity for EFI to reflect on the achievements so far of our EFI Strategy and discuss and identify future goals, topics and structures to successfully continue implementing it. We therefore developed a new Strategy Implementation Plan (SIP) for the period 2022-2025, as an evolution of the successful 2017-2021 Strategy Implementation Plan.

During 2017-2021, despite the slowdown of some important projects due to the pandemic, EFI increased its credibility and impact as a research-based organization as well as a science-policy-media broker. This can be seen through the increasing number of policy support publications, articles and events as well as the exponential growth in our media reach. The three EFI strategy themes of Bioeconomy, Resilience and Governance are now well-acknowledged as an integral part of the EFI brand. At the same time EFI is globally perceived as an intellectual authority on the circular bioeconomy concept,

demonstrated by our hosting of the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance established by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales in 2020.

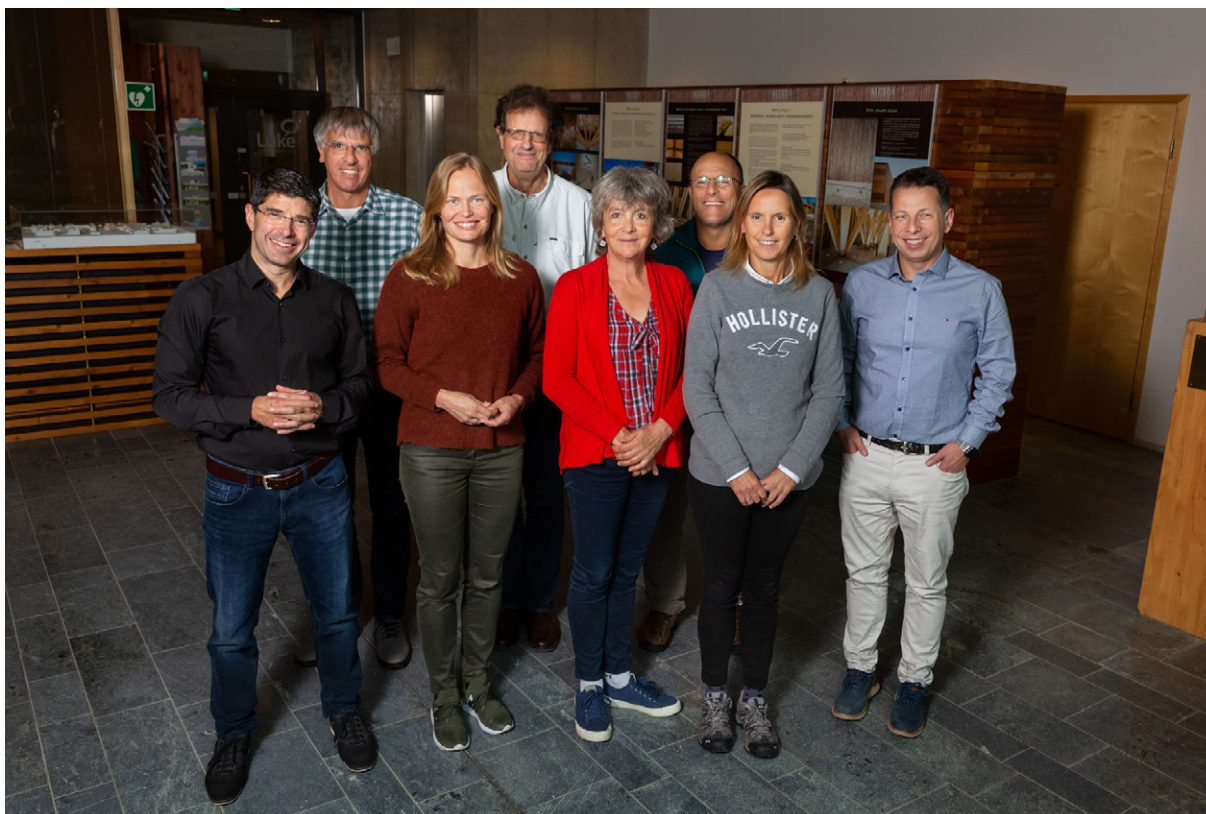
The new SIP 2022-2025 contains the new research, policy topics and questions that we would like to address in the coming years in collaboration with our network. It also describes the diversity of EFI structures (Programmes, Facilities and Research Networks) that will populate the EFI organizational ecosystem by 2025. This will include a new office in Rome, which will host a new Biocities Facility to bring EFI closer to the urban world. As result of the new SIP we have also started working on developing two additional Facilities on Forest Genetics and International Partnerships, as an evolution from two existing initiatives, EUFORGEN and the FLEGT-REDD Unit. We continue to evolve to connect knowledge to action for the benefit of our forests, people and the planet.

*Marc Palahi*

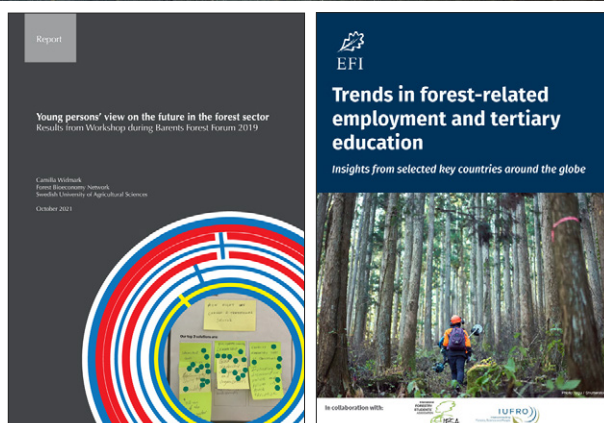
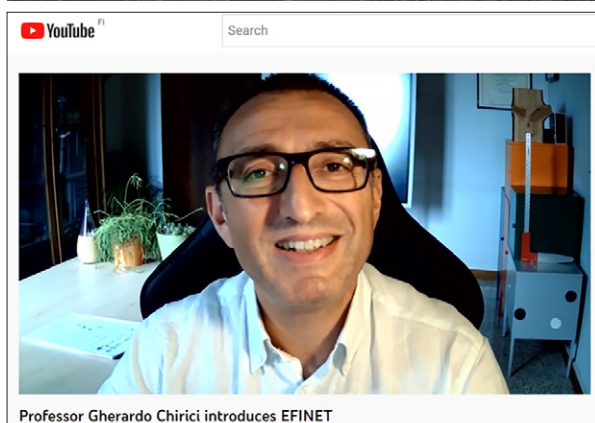


# An ambitious European forest research and innovation area





Johanna Kolkola



Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which continued to be an obstacle for the implementation of activities, 2021 was an eventful year. At the European level we saw the presentation of the **New EU Forest Strategy for 2030** and the launching of the new **Horizon Europe Framework Programme**, both of which are bringing important developments to the European (forest) research area.

### Enhancing European and regional cooperation

EFI mobilised and led the joint response to the paper *Abrupt increase in harvested forest area over Europe after 2015* published in Nature<sup>1</sup>. The original study used satellite data to assess changes in forest cover and claimed an

abrupt increase of 69% in the harvested forest in Europe from 2016, suggesting that this resulted from expanding wood markets encouraged by EU bioeconomy and bioenergy policies. The publication triggered a heated debate, both scientific and political. In the EFI-led response<sup>2</sup>, 30 scientists from 13 European countries argued that the large harvest changes resulted from methodological errors, related to satellite sensitivity improving markedly over the period of assessment, as well as to changes in forests due to natural disturbances being often attributed wrongly to timber harvests. The implications of these errors are of global relevance.

<sup>1</sup> Ceccherini, G., Duveiller, G., Grassi, G. et al. Abrupt increase in harvested forest area over Europe after 2015. *Nature* 583, 72–77 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-020-2438-y>

<sup>2</sup> Palahí, M., Valbuena, R., Senf, C. et al. Concerns about reported harvests in European forests. *Nature* 592, E15–E17 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03292-x>





In 2021, three Research Networks were active: the European Forest Policy Research Network (coordinated by BOKU), the Forest Bioeconomy Research Network (coordinated by SLU) and the newly established Planted Forests Research Network. The Planted Forests Research Network is coordinated by IEFC (Institut Européen de la Forêt Cultivée) with the support of 10 partner organizations, and contributes to the implementation of the EFI Resilience and Bioeconomy Strategy themes. It addresses both regional diversity as well as emerging challenges and opportunities for planted forests.

### Investing in our members

In 2021, EFI launched an **EFI Network Fund** grant call to mobilise EFI member organizations with relevant expertise to collectively reflect, contextualize and synthesize existing scientific research and knowledge, and develop a conceptual framework for a harmonised European forest monitoring system. The EFINET consortium coordinated by Professor Gherardo Chirici from the University of Florence and including six EFI Associate Members from six countries, was successful in the call. The final

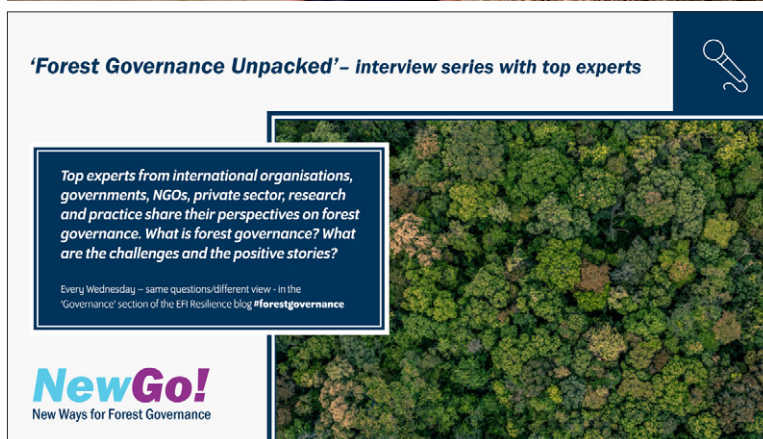
results of the work are expected to be available in December 2022.

### Supporting the next generation

Fostering capacity building and the international co-operation of young scientists is another of EFI's priorities. The **Young Leadership Programme** (YLP) connects young professionals with global and regional leaders to develop strategic thinking on how to manage forest resources to address societal challenges. The 2021 edition, organised in collaboration with Diputació de Barcelona, was held online due to the global pandemic, and focused on Mediterranean forests and sustainable urbanised societies. 14 participants joined the programme from 10 countries.

Two reports on young people and the forest sector were published in 2021. The Forest Bioeconomy Research Network published a report on the *Young persons' view on the future in the forest sector*, particularly looking at education, equal opportunities and labour supply. The 'Global student networking and green jobs in the forest sector'





Rach Colling

project, coordinated by EFI in collaboration with the International Forestry Students' Association (IFSA) and the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) published *Trends in forest-related employment and tertiary education: insights from selected key countries around the globe*. It looked at forest-related employment including adjacent and emerging fields such as green jobs in seven countries.

### Exploring new avenues

New Ways for Forest Governance (NewGo) is the flagship project of the Governance Programme, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL). It aims to provide scientific knowledge with a specific focus on REDD+ and FLEGT initiatives and the potential of emerging new policies relating to zero deforestation, forest restoration and sustainable forest finance. In 2021 the project presented "Forest Governance Unpacked", a series of interviews with experts to elaborate on the concept of forest governance and provide different perspectives on the related topics, challenges and best-practice examples.

The Bioeconomy programme strengthened its capacity to address Bioeconomy markets developments, launching a Principal scientist position supported by the Foundation for European Forest Research. The potential of forest bioeconomy was also explored in *Forest products in the global bioeconomy: Enabling substitution by wood-based products and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals*, authored by EFI researchers and published by FAO. It addresses the role of forest products in the global bioeconomy and how they can help replace fossil-based and GHG-intensive products, outlining emerging products that open a range of uses while decreasing material and carbon footprints and reducing pollution and waste generation.

The Resilience Programme successfully kicked-off the RESONATE project (**Resilient forest value chains – enhancing resilience through natural and socio-economic responses**). The project is funded by the European Commission (H2020 programme) and has 20 partner institutions from 12 different European countries. RESONATE will develop a common resilience assessment framework, which will be applied to 10 case studies covering forests and related value chains at the regional, national, or European level.



# Science-informed policies to address societal challenges and opportunities

In times of increased political attention to forests, EFI's policy support activities are becoming even more relevant.

The Policy Support Facility Trust Fund started a new five-year period in 2021 and now has 11 member countries. In 2021, activities included one Knowledge to Action study and the translation of one From Science to Policy study into Chinese. One ThinkForest webinar was organised, due to the continued impacts of COVID-19 on face-to-face events. Three new study teams started their work, which will be published in 2022.

A timely Knowledge to Action study *Key Questions on Forests in the EU*, together with extended questions available online, compiled key research findings to answer 12 questions on forests in the EU and the benefits they provide to society. It aimed to inform a wider range of people who are not forest experts, but who are interested in information on some of the many contributions forests make to achieving EU policy goals. The publication received a high number of citations by policymakers, including the Estonian Ministry of the Environment, and JRC/European Commission.



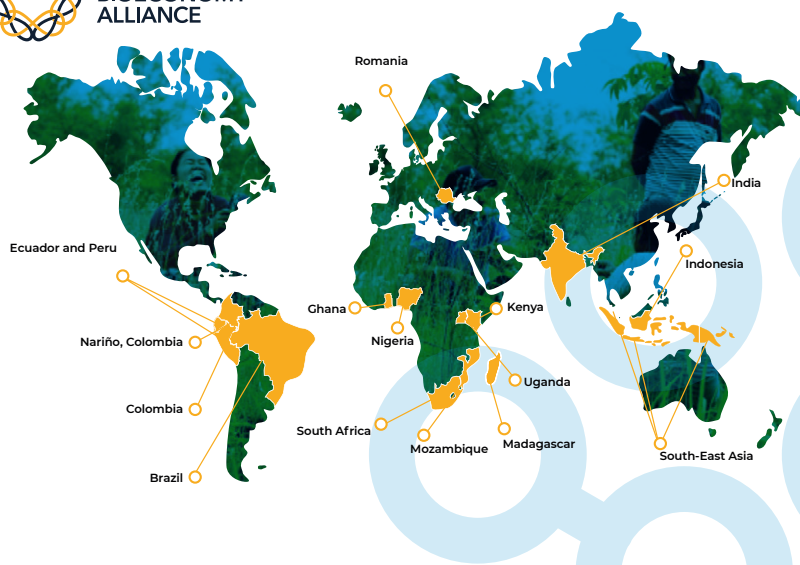


Johanna Kokkola



CIRCULAR  
BIOECONOMY  
ALLIANCE

Living Labs



### New face:

Helga Pülzl became Assistant Director for Policy Support.

In April 2021, Forest Europe held its 8th Ministerial Conference virtually and the process was officially handed over to Germany as chair. The Liaison Unit Bonn (LUBo) is for the first time in 30 years complemented by a scientific support team, provided by EFI. EFI's team provides science-informed policy support, communication, and dissemination services, and ensures a strong link to the scientific and policy support capacities of EFI member organizations. One of the first tasks was the development of the Forest Europe Work Programme 2021-2024, which focuses on three areas: Sustainable Forest Management (SFM); a pan-European Forest Risk Mechanism; and Green Jobs and Forest Education.

Since 2020, EFI has hosted the Secretariat of Koli Forum, a high-level discussion platform focusing on the sustainable use of natural resources and the opportunities available through the bioeconomy. The biennial international Koli Forum seminar, "Forests for Future Generations" was organized as a hybrid event in October. During the event, the participants formulated the Koli Theses.

### Connecting science-policy-practice

In 2021, the name of the FLEGT and REDD Unit changed to **International Partnerships Facility**. The new name brings to light what has always been at the core of the Facility's work: facilitating partnerships between producing and consuming countries. The change is in line with an expanding scope of the Facility's work, which no longer takes place solely in the context of FLEGT and REDD+ processes, and with larger developments taking place in the environmental and forest sector. There is growing recognition that only by addressing the multiple drivers of de-

forestation, and in partnership with others, can we protect and restore the world's forests. The 10 lessons the EU REDD Facility shared to celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary illustrate this.

Another global initiative led by EFI is the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance (CBA), which connects the dots between investors, companies, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and local communities to advance the circular bioeconomy while restoring biodiversity globally. In 2021 the CBA started building a global network of Living Labs for Nature, People and Planet to demonstrate how harmony can be achieved by empowering nature and people in a concrete territorial context, integrating traditional knowledge, capitalizing on new research and innovation, and based on public-private partnerships that place local communities at their centre. Each Living Lab uses a landscape restoration project to catalyse the development of circular bioeconomy value chains while restoring biodiversity and local livelihoods.

The Genetic Resources Facility (EFIGEN) was introduced in 2021. EFIGEN aims to become a European hub for promoting research, providing policy support and networking in relation to forest genetic resources. In 2021, the Facility successfully concluded the H2020 project GenRes Bridge. The project developed an overarching *Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe*, which was launched in November in Brussels. EFIGEN also hosts the secretariat of the EUFORGEN Programme (an implementation mechanism of the Forest Europe process) including the European Information System on Forest Genetic Resources (EUFGIS). In 2021, the EUFORGEN Programme finalised the development of the *Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe*.





# Awareness in society of the importance of forests

## Supporting better informed dialogue

EFI continues to actively engage with media, and in March 2021, a virtual Solution Hack for Journalists was organised in collaboration with The Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra. Sixteen editors and journalists from international media including The Guardian, New Scientist, Mongabay and Vogue discussed with experts the problems of today's "take, make, use, waste" model of the economy and the links between global trade, products, and environmental degradation. The journalists also reflected on 'what they can do differently' to conduct more evidence-based reporting.

The Solution Hack was part of the March online forum, "Nature at the heart of a global circular bioeconomy"

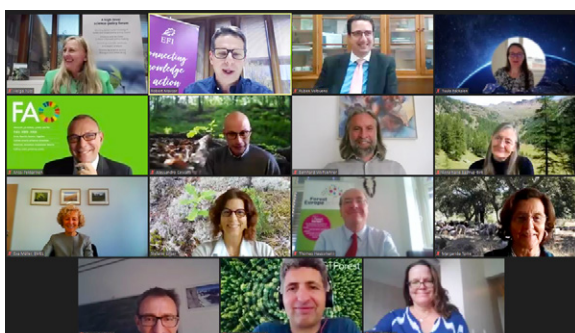
which brought together over 1,000 participants from the global north and south. This was the first ever event to take a value chain approach and connect the dots between investment, innovation, sustainability and the circular bioeconomy in the global north and south. The event was opened by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales and was organised by EFI in collaboration with the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and World Agroforestry (ICRAF), the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, the Global Landscapes Forum (GLF) and the Circular Bioeconomy Alliance.

Having a better understanding of ongoing debates/narratives in social and other media can facilitate the identification of topics that need to be addressed by EFI's re-





Maria Schlossmacher



search, policy support or communication activities. A first attempt in this direction was the **Out of the Flames** initiative (part of the NewGO! Project) that explored online engagement and public narratives around the 2019 Amazon rainforest fires using social media data from Twitter, Facebook, Google, Instagram, and YouTube.

## Bringing new perspectives

EFI brought together different communities to exchange perspectives in 2021. Two workshops were organized by the Integrate Network to build communication capacity among researchers, policymakers and practitioners working in nature conservation and sustainable forest management. Topics included 'Building a Narrative' and 'Engaging with Media'. The 2021 Urban Forestry Days also brought together a triangle of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to explore the role of urban forests for a transition towards sustainable cities and to discuss linkages between urban green, health and wellbeing. The two-day collaborative event was hosted by EFI, the European Forum on Urban Forestry (EFUF) and the H2020 CLEARING HOUSE project, with over 750 participants from over 68 different countries.

In schools, science is often presented in an abstract way, but to spark students' deep interest, it needs to be related to their everyday lives. This is the idea behind the H2020 project MULTIPLIERS (MULTIplayers Partnerships to ensure meaningful engagement with Science and Research) which began in 2021. The project aims to expand

opportunities for science learning by fostering cooperation between students, schools, families, local communities, civil society, research institutions, media, policymakers, and industry around societal and environmental challenges.

## Interacting with our network

Due to COVID-19 related restrictions, for the second consecutive year, EFI's Annual Conference and Scientific Seminar were organised online. In October over 100 participants joined the EFI Secretariat to discuss the future, carry out decision-making and welcome new members. In the Members' Dialogue session, EFI's new Strategy Implementation Plan for 2022-2025 was presented. As neither the 2020 or 2021 Annual Conference were held face-to-face as planned, it was decided that the 2024 Annual Conference will be held in Bonn, Germany and the 2025 Annual Conference in Prague, Czech Republic.

EFI's Scientific Seminar explored the topic of forest monitoring systems in Europe, looking first at the latest scientific and technical developments in the field of remote sensing and forest monitoring, and then discussing the needs of policymakers for forest-related data and information. It highlighted how important cooperation and partnership between different systems are, and that the time is right to establish an integrated monitoring system that can give scientists, policy makers and the public information about the multifunctionality of forests.





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