



Bonn Ministerial Declaration

FOREST EUROPE - Keeping Sustainable Forest Management Fit for the Future

Adopted by the Expert Level Meeting on 4 June 2024 for consideration and signature by the Ministers at the Ninth FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference

We, as representatives of the Signatories of FOREST EUROPE, at the Ninth Ministerial Conference of FOREST EUROPE, held in Bonn/Germany on 1-2 October 2024,

1. ACKNOWLEDGING that FOREST EUROPE has played the leading role in defining sustainable forest management, with a long history of promoting this dynamic concept across Europe,
2. RECALLING FOREST EUROPE resolutions, declarations, decisions and particularly the Bratislava Ministerial Declaration of 2021,
3. REAFFIRMING the definition and principle of sustainable forest management as laid down in the FOREST EUROPE Helsinki Resolution 1,
4. UNDERLINING that the dynamic concept of sustainable forest management has again been thoroughly reviewed over the past chairing period, that it remains relevant, and that it provides a robust foundation that can be adapted to the changing needs of the future,
5. HIGHLIGHTING the role of FOREST EUROPE as the voluntary high-level political process for dialogue, cross-sectoral cooperation and transboundary cooperation on forests and forestry in Europe and EMPHASIZING the relevance of the newly established High-level Policy Dialogue format in this regard to promptly react to emerging issues of policy interest,
6. STRESSING the need to further develop common strategies to strengthen sustainable forest management in the pan-European region TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the most recent international commitments, such as the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, and the KUNMING-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the continuously changing social, political, economic and environmental context within which forest management is practised as well as the increasing societal demands on forests,
7. EMPHASIZING the importance of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy, in particular for climate change adaptation, mitigation and biodiversity protection and the supply of sustainably produced wood, non-wood forest products and by-products ensuring the efficient use of resources, thereby contributing to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by equally considering the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability,



8. REAFFIRMING the key role of multifunctional and sustainably managed forests in support of achieving a sustainable and climate-neutral economy by 2050, while ensuring that forest ecosystems are vital, resilient and adequately protected for their multiple uses,
9. NOTING the importance, role and adequacy of skilled workforces to implement sustainable forest management while ensuring the provision of forest ecosystem services and EMPHASIZING the need to work towards standardized and internationally recognized qualifications in the forest sector,
10. WELCOMING the progress in implementing the “Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe” launched by EUFORGEN to enhance the adaptive capacity and resilience of European forests and STRESSING the need to identify gaps, to assess threats and set priorities for the conservation of forest genetic resources through the “Genetic Conservation Unit Network”, maintained by EUFORGEN,
11. REITERATING the Ministerial Decision from August 2022 to support Ukraine in building back better its forest sector along with necessary reforms after the war-related breakdown to conserve, restore and sustainably manage its forests and BEING CONCERNED about significant negative impacts of the war on the environment and natural resources in Ukraine, resulting in long-term consequences in the recovery process of the forests and forest sector,
12. STRESSING the continued need for cooperation and synergies with forest-related processes and organizations in participating and sharing the experiences of this pan-European process, notably at sessions of the “United Nations Forum on Forests” and other relevant international forest organizations such as UNECE and FAO,

commit ourselves to:

13. continue to promote and implement the dynamic concept of sustainable forest management as the integrative basis of forest strategies, plans or programmes in political dialogues and in response to emerging issues and societal demands on European forests,
14. support the role of FOREST EUROPE as a high-level political process bringing together different stakeholder interests and demands on forests and promoting adaptive and balanced approaches to further work on sustainable forest management at pan-European and national levels,
15. further develop the FOREST EUROPE process as a platform to connect the increasing number of forest-related sectors and actors, including through new formats for action such as High-level Policy Dialogues, and to support inter-sectoral dialogue in order to avoid fragmentation of forest policy,



16. establish new working modalities to make the FOREST EUROPE process fit for the future, as annexed to this Declaration, while providing greater accessibility and broader opportunities to be engaged in a more flexible way, thus keeping and even enhancing the ownership of all Signatories and Observers in the process,
17. re-examine FOREST EUROPE outcomes, commitments and initiatives as building blocks and lessons learned for future actions and seek synergies with relevant initiatives and processes,
18. enhance Green Forest Jobs and forest education in business and society, and mobilize partners and resources within and beyond the forest sector to acknowledge their importance for a just transition towards a sustainable and circular bioeconomy,
19. promote the continued development and use of tools and technologies in forest monitoring, reporting and communication for the implementation of sustainable forest management at national, sub-national and pan-European levels,
20. continue an inclusive and open discussion, as facilitated by the “FOREST EUROPE Think Tank”, on sustainable forest management as a dynamic and evolving concept, while bringing the latest scientific evidence and other forms of knowledge to bear,
21. initiate a review of criteria and indicators for decision-making on sustainable forest management and present the results at the next Ministerial Conference, and thus strengthen monitoring, reporting, and assessment of forest resources and sustainable forest management in Europe,
22. support and participate in the development of the “State of Europe’s Forest” as an essential element of pan-European forest reporting, while exploring novel and up-to-date formats of forest communication during the reporting cycles,
23. consider, as appropriate and possible, strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation and technical support in building back better the Ukrainian forest sector during and after the war.



Annex to the Bonn Ministerial Declaration

Working modalities of the FOREST EUROPE process

Background and overarching objectives

FOREST EUROPE is the voluntary high-level political process for European countries and the European Union, with the participation of Observers, for promoting dialogue, cross-sectoral cooperation and transboundary cooperation on sustainable forest management in the pan-European region. The Signatories take decisions on common aspects of the highest political relevance regarding forests, forestry and forest-related issues to maximize the contribution of forests and sustainable forest management in Europe to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the region and to allow for adaptation to climate change and the halting of biodiversity loss. The joint ownership of this unique pan-European process by its Signatories and Observers is one of the core values of the FOREST EUROPE process.

Over the last 30 years, the current working conditions have been developed, and informal rules of procedure have proved to be the best way to work together. One example is the rotation principle for both the membership of the General Coordinating Committee (GCC) - as the body to steer the work of the Liaison Units and to secure the funding of the FOREST EUROPE budget - and for the Lead Country. It should be noted that a Liaison Unit is not an international legal entity. Therefore, the final responsibility lies with the acting Lead Country.

The current rotating system of the GCC, with political and financial commitments over approx. 20 years - with costs culminating towards the end of this long period - needs to be revised since national budgetary laws usually do not allow such a long-term formal commitment.

In 2016/17, FOREST EUROPE revisited the working modalities during its review process and published the report "Future direction of FOREST EUROPE". Based on this work, the FOREST EUROPE Expert Level Meeting (ELM) adopted the document "Description of the FOREST EUROPE structures, procedures and work modalities" in March 2019. This document describes the rules on how the FOREST EUROPE process functions in line with established practice and basic principles rooted in the Helsinki General Declaration (1993).

Guiding principles and objectives

Without changing the objectives of FOREST EUROPE as a voluntary high-level political process to strengthen sustainable forest management, the current working modalities need to be adjusted to make the process fit for the future. This means finding more flexible ways to work together and ensuring the continued voluntary and active engagement of all Signatories and Observers in the political and technical steering work and in co-financing the process, thereby ensuring sufficient ownership of the process.



The membership of the GCC is decoupled from any direct financial commitment. This enables all Signatories to take over this important role when it is deemed politically attractive and feasible. It also means that work programmes can be adjusted according to available resources, and can enlarge the basis for available lead expertise - both professionally and geographically. This is also in line with most of the other international processes where the steering committee's role is not linked to direct funding of the respective process.

Steering the work of FOREST EUROPE

It is generally agreed that the Ministerial Conference remains the highest-level body and core event of the FOREST EUROPE process at the end of the respective term for the Lead Country, the latter acting as the chair of the process. The Ministerial Conference ensures continued political guidance by ministers and the visibility of the FOREST EUROPE process in the international forest policy arena. At the same time, it provides visibility and an opportunity for the Lead Country to present itself. The frequency for the organization of a Ministerial Conference should be in line with the political priority of the respective Lead Country and as necessary to support the overall process but is usually held at an interval of between 2 and 5 years. It is common understanding to have a consensus on the expected outcome of the Ministerial Conference and its preparation at an ELM beforehand. The Ministerial Conference should focus mainly on discussing emerging issues and enabling a dialogue between the partners involved as well as taking strategic decisions on the future of the process.

Informal ministerial gatherings (High-level Policy Dialogues - HLPD) offer an additional platform to discuss emerging topics of high relevance for international forest policy and are organized as feasible.

The role of a Lead Country remains that of steering the FOREST EUROPE process for one term, supported by the other GCC members, while the length of this term should be kept flexible according to the priorities of the Lead Country but should not exceed five years. In addition, the responsibility of a Lead Country is to set up a small secretariat, appoint the Head of the Liaison Unit as the responsible contact point for the whole term and to chair the GCC, the ELM and the Ministerial Conference. The chairing of the process is done in close cooperation with the co-chair country which normally becomes the next chair of the GCC. It is therefore advisable that Signatories volunteering as Lead Countries should have served at least once as a GCC member and ideally as a co-chair prior to being the chair. At a given Ministerial Conference, a Signatory volunteering to become the next chair is appointed. If an election between more candidates is necessary, the majority vote of the Signatories present applies.

The steering role of the GCC will remain important in the future as well. It is suggested that the GCC should be composed of up to five Signatories. The GCC membership spans one period but can, subject to reelection, also extend to two or more rotation periods. Members for the coming period are appointed at a Ministerial Conference; if elections are necessary the same rules as above apply, taking e.g. regional balance into account.



Work programme and financing the work of FOREST EUROPE

Hosting the FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference is entrusted to the Lead Country.

Financial support for participants from countries in transition remains relevant to ensure full participation, notably at Ministerial Conferences, but depends on voluntary funding from a donor. The Lead Country may invite an International Organization to help facilitate the secretariat's work.

The organization of an HLPD is up to the Lead Country and/or other donors, as deemed appropriate and subject to availability of funds. To reduce the costs and to increase the attendance, it is recommended that online or hybrid HLPDs are offered if appropriate.

The Lead Country is responsible for developing a work programme adapted to available resources and set up in dialogue with Signatories and Observers for approval by an ELM. The implementation of the work programme relies mainly on voluntary in-kind and financial contributions from Signatories and Observers. All Signatories and Observers are thus invited to contribute if they are in the position to do so. The continued work on the dynamic concept of sustainable forest management (SFM), its Criteria and Indicators (C+I) and the joint publication of the flagship report "State of Europe's Forests" (SoEF) with UNECE and FAO, remain the top priorities within the work programme. Therefore, project-based funding for the 5-year reporting cycle to secure the SFM work and SoEF publication needs to be ensured by Signatories and Observers.

The contribution of Signatories and Observers can be either in the form of contributions to the FOREST EUROPE Multi-Donor Trust Fund, which is to be set up by the Lead Country if not available, in-kind contributions e.g. by expert attendance at meetings and participation in studies, by national focal centers or experts becoming actively involved in the work or by covering the costs of a meeting. Other options include e.g. seconding national staff to the Liaison Unit.

Flexible, smart working methods, for example facilitating mobile working for Liaison Unit members, may further reduce costs. A preference for digital documents and reports to the largest possible extent and using English as the working language to avoid costs for interpretation and translation, whenever possible, is necessary. Meetings should be organized where necessary and possible as online meetings only. The Head of the Liaison Unit is responsible for keeping an overview of all contributions received and the budget spent and reporting this information back to the GCC and subsequently to the ELM.