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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

Eighty-second session

Geneva, 13-15 November 2024

## Report of the eighty-second session of the Economic Commission for Europe Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry

### I. Introduction

1. The eighty-second session of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) was held in Geneva, Switzerland from 13 to 15 November 2024.
2. The web page of this meeting<sup>1</sup> includes documents and presentations (whose content and conclusions are not part of this report).

### II. Attendance

3. Delegations from the following member States participated in the session: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uzbekistan.
4. The following United Nations Member States also participated: Argentina, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Panama.
5. Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Trade Centre (ITC), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and World Bank attended.
6. Representatives of the European Union (EU) and European Commission participated as observers.
7. A representative of Forest Europe participated as an observer.
8. The following non-governmental organizations attended as observers: American Hardwood Export Council, Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), Earthworm Foundation, European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), Fern, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Global Platform for Sustainable Natural Rubber (GPSNR), Grain and Feed

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\* Reissued for technical reasons on 25 June 2025.

<sup>1</sup> <https://unece.org/info/Forests/events/386478>.



Trade Association (GAFTA), Indigenous Relations and Forestry Forest Products Association of Canada, International Council of Tanners, Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), Québec Arbres, Quebec Wood Export Bureau, Stichting Probos, Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), United Kingdom Meat and Livestock Australia, Union of European Foresters (UEF), Union of Timber Manufacturers and Exporters of the Russian Federation.

9. Representatives from the private sector and academia attended as observers: Bern University of Applied Sciences, Cocoasource, COTANCE - The European Leather Industry, Dovetail Partners, Drima Marketing Research, Enviva, Quality Certification Institute for the leather sector (ICEC), Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS), Stora Enso, UNIC - Italian Tanners' Association, University of Washington.

### **III. Opening**

10. The session was chaired by Mr. Peter Blombäck (Sweden) who welcomed delegates.

### **IV. Adoption of the agenda**

11. Delegates adopted the agenda.

### **V. Forest economics and markets**

#### **A. Deforestation-free trade dialogue**

12. Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), welcomed participants to the eighty-second session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, and the "Deforestation-Free Trade Dialogue". He highlighted that the ECE region sustainably managed over 40 per cent of the world's forests and produced 60 per cent of global wood fibers acknowledging the possible indirect contribution of the ECE region to deforestation through the consumption of goods like soy, palm oil, and wood products. He noted that several countries, as well as the European Union (EU) were taking steps to advance deforestation-free trade. The EU, for example had introduced a legal framework for key agricultural commodities, including wood-based products. He emphasized the Committee's role in convening all stakeholders and discussing impacts of trade on forest products in the region. He encouraged participants to engage in a constructive dialogue, share ideas and help reduce deforestation globally. He stressed that deforestation-free trade opened also opportunities for economies, climate mitigation, and sustainable forest management in the ECE region and globally.

13. A Chair's summary of the presentations and discussions from the Deforestation-Free Trade Dialogue will be published on the web page of the eighty-second session: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/events/386478>.

#### **B Draft Forest Products Market Statement**

14. The secretariat informed the Committee that COFFI's market statement had been prepared based on the findings of the Forest Products Annual Market Review 2023-2024, data from 25 member States submitted via the Timber Forecast Questionnaires as well as the country market statements. The latter were submitted by member States prior to the session and posted on the secretariat website. Delegations welcomed the country market statements highlighting the opportunity for including relevant information beyond the current structure. The secretariat noted the wealth of information contained therein stressing that issuing this information as an electronic publication in the future would increase visibility and accessibility.

15. The representative from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recalled the terms, definitions and data collection modalities used in FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA). He also informed the Committee that the recent FRA Remote Sensing Survey<sup>2</sup> found that agriculture is the key driver of deforestation globally.

16. The Committee thanked the speakers, moderators and participants for their insights and active participation. The Committee:

(a) Took note and thanked the secretariat for the excellent organization of the Deforestation-Free Trade Dialogue; welcomed the discussions and the experiences shared;

(b) Invited member States to consider the outcome of the Dialogue to inform current and planned national deforestation-free trade policies and measures;

(c) Requested the secretariat to engage with the FAO-managed process defining forest degradation globally;

(d) Agreed on having a focused event at the start of COFFI sessions addressing trade-policy related issues, involving also constituencies other than forests as resources allow;

(e) Agreed to continue discussing deforestation-free trade policies and measures as appropriate;

(f) Agreed to maintain focus on market reviews and statements and dedicate enough time to their discussion;

(g) Adopted the market statement as agreed and finalized by the drafting group and invited member States to continue reporting in 2025;

(h) Encouraged member States to provide their country market statements to the secretariat in 2025;

(i) Requested the secretariat to publish country market statements in a compiled format henceforth, mindful of their high value.

## **VI. Matters arising since the last session**

### **A. United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies**

17. The Director of the ECE Forests, Land and Housing Division informed delegates that the United Nations secretariat was still facing a liquidity crisis that had led to a recruitment freeze and currently a still unfilled post in the Forestry section. She mentioned that preparations were under way for the seventy-first session of the Economic Commission for Europe to be held in April 2025 and that significant progress had been made on the implementation of ECE (2023 session) decision (B70) on Digital and green transformations in support of sustainable development in the ECE region citing as examples: the continuous updating of the INForest platform, the development of a new forest knowledge platform to be released soon, the online collection of the pan-European data for the forest resources assessment and the development and subsequent piloting of the online data collection for the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JSFQ). Emphasizing that most of this work as well as that on communication, capacity-building and cities was generously funded by donors, she expressed her sincere gratitude to the 2024 donors—Canada, Finland, San Marino and Switzerland—and stressed the need for continuous funding support for these areas which directly benefit member States in times of severely limited resources at the United Nations secretariat level.

<sup>2</sup> FAO. 2022. FRA 2020 Remote Sensing Survey. FAO Forestry Paper, No. 186. Rome.

## **B Recent developments in other organizations**

18. The representative of the FAO updated the Committee on the July 2024 session of COFO, highlighting major themes, outcomes and implementation of decisions. He also informed delegate of FAO meetings and events in 2025.

19. The Head of the Liaison Unit Bonn, Forest Europe, thanked ECE for the strong cooperation and presented the work of Forest Europe. He noted the end of Germany's Liaison Unit Bonn's term and the start of Sweden's in 2025, highlighted the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference in Bonn, Germany (October 2024) including the signing of a Ministerial Declaration and a Ministerial Decision and the establishment of the Forest Risk Facility (FoRISK). He also noted Forest Europe's work on communication, green jobs, forest education, the involvement of youth organizations in decision-making processes and Forest Europe's work in support of the Ukrainian forest sector. Delegates welcomed the youth work and offered to share available youth engagement materials. The delegation from Germany thanked ECE for its cooperation with Forest Europe and Sweden for taking over the liaison unit, also highlighting the role of UNFF in strengthening international forest work. ECE thanked Mr. Thomas Haußmann for his leadership and spirit of cooperation.

20. The ECE secretariat reported on the work of the informal European Forest Alliance (EFA) in 2024 noting two meetings organized and the focus topic of communication. It highlighted the EFA social media campaign on forest resilience produced by ECE with Forest Europe in early September 2024. The ECE secretariat announced that the next session would take place in early 2025 and the organizations to be involved. Switzerland emphasized the value of this informal cooperation mechanism, highlighting that one additional topic identified for EFA cooperation was forest genetics.

21. The Committee:

(a) Took note of the secretariats' report on matters arising, including the preparations for the seventy-first session of the Economic Commission for Europe;

(b) Took note of the reports by FAO and Forest Europe as well as the informal European Forest Alliance (secretariats of ECE, European Environment Agency (EEA), European Forest Institute Integrate Network (EFI Integrate Network), FAO and Forest Europe) and their implications for the work of COFFI.

## **VII. Reporting on the Committee's Programme of Work**

### **A. Programme of work for 2025 and recommendations on key components of the programme of work for 2026**

22. The secretary of COFFI presented the draft programme of work of the Forests and the Forest Industry subprogramme for 2025 and the recommendations on key components of the programme of work for 2026. She explained that the allocation of the ECE budget resources to this subprogramme was based on this programmatic document. Possible amendments to performance indicators could be considered in future programmes of work. The Committee amended the proposed 2026 draft programme of work, removed the term "land" in Section 1 and added mention of "trade" in Section II

23. The Committee:

(a) Endorsed the Forests and Forest Industry subprogramme's draft programme of work for 2025 (ECE/TIM/2024/10) and the outline of key components of the Forests and Forest Industry subprogramme's programme of work for 2026 (ECE/TIM/2024/Inf.2) with amendments;

(b) Requested the secretariat to prepare the programme of work for 2026, together with an outline for 2027, for review and endorsement at the 2025 session.

## **B. Boreal forest work**

24. The secretariat updated the Committee on the work on boreal forests, which focused on a scoping study on forests and the forest sector in the boreal biome. The study was based on national overviews provided by countries with boreal forests as well as research and literature reviews. The study, together with the national overviews, will be published in early 2025. The secretariat thanked the author, reviewers and experts from Canada, Finland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden, and the United States for their invaluable contributions to this work.

25. Delegates reiterated the need for targeted communication and publications that increase public awareness of the importance of the boreal forest to store carbon, purify the air and water, and regulate the climate.

26. The Committee:

- (a) Took note of the information provided and expressed its gratitude for the work by the secretariat and experts;
- (b) Encouraged the dissemination of the project's publication and information.

## **C. Urban forestry work**

27. The secretariat reviewed activities in urban and peri-urban forestry during the past year and introduced document ECE/TIM/2024/6 on activities supporting the implementation of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan. The secretariat informed the Committee about the recently established Trees in Dry Cities Coalition, the Trees in Cities Challenge, the UN Petite Forest Network, the NaturEaTown project, as well as related matters.

28. The secretariat invited delegations to inform the Committee of their actions to promote and support urban and peri-urban forestry at the national level, particularly the implementation of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan. Delegates from Canada, Poland (written contribution), Switzerland and Uzbekistan presented their national experience. Delegates from France, Ireland, Norway, the Russian Federation and San Marino shared their national contexts.

29. Delegations highlighted the important role of gathering information and case studies to guide and inform collective efforts and emphasized the significance of engaging in international forums for example the European Forum for Urban Forestry and promoting capacity-building, peer exchange and partnership among countries, cities and other stakeholders.

30. The Committee:

- (a) Took note of the information and requested member States to submit a nomination of a national focal point for an informal task force on the implementation of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan to the secretariat;
- (b) Invited the secretariat to continue its work on urban trees, forests and food.

## **D. Forest information systems**

31. The secretariat presented the outcomes of the recently concluded project on strengthening the capacity of policy and decision makers, and forest service specialists to develop national forest information systems in Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Key project outputs include an overview study, a guide on strategic planning and organization of development of forest information systems, an information note and a training course. They were developed leveraging knowledge and experience from various countries and were piloted during the UNECE/FAO Regional Forest Information Week held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in October 2024.

32. The secretariat thanked the Russian Federation for funding the project, and the authors, reviewers, and experts from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan for their valuable contributions.

33. The Committee:

(a) Took note of the work accomplished in this area including the publications and guidance produced;

(b) Asked the secretariat to disseminate the results and encouraged member States to make use of the knowledge and training provided.

## **E. Update on automation of data**

34. The secretariat updated delegations on progress made in the data repository, including the automation of data collection and processing. The secretariat highlighted that it will consult with the Team of Specialists on Forest Products and Wood Energy Statistics on technical matters as needed. Furthermore, it will continue to coordinate with the Intersecretariat Working Group on Forest Sector Statistics, which jointly manages the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire. Delegates were invited to take note and provide comments and guidance on next steps and funding sources. Germany expressed appreciation for the work and offered to exchange information during platform testing.

35. The Committee:

(a) Thanked the secretariat and took note of the progress achieved;

(b) Provided comments and guidance on next steps and funding sources.

## **F. Climate change and forests in the Economic Commission for Europe region**

36. The secretariat presented the outcomes of the discussions on climate change and forests organized during the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management in May 2024 to examine opportunities for the contribution to climate discussions and raising globally the profile of forests in the ECE region. The secretariat presented possible pathways for the regional contributions to the future sessions of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

37. Delegates emphasized the importance of climate change to the forest sector's work and highlighted the need to continue this work including for information-sharing and cooperation with other organizations, as well as data collection and analysis e.g. in line with the FAO Forest Resources Assessment and Forest Europe.

38. The Committee:

(a) Welcomed the work on climate change and forests;

(b) Took note of the proposed options for possible ways forward, including information-sharing, collaboration with other organizations, data collection and communication.

## **G. Communication and activities 2024 and 2025**

39. The secretary of COFFI presented events and meetings organized in 2024, highlighting the International Day of Forest events on forests and innovation. She also mentioned the communication kits prepared for the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) and the new podcast episodes, and screened a video on the value of wood-based materials. She previewed the 2025 events and thanked donors for their support to this work.

40. The Committee thanked the secretariat for the information provided highlighting the increased visibility of its work and asked delegations to further support ECE in bringing forests in the ECE region to the attention of international agendas.

## **VIII. Integrated Programme of Work**

### **A. Review of Draft 1 Integrated Programme of Work 2026-2029**

41. As agreed at the May 2024 session of the (Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2024/2 para 52 c and d), the secretariat had prepared draft 1 of the Integrated Programme of Work (document ECE/TIM/2024/9). It included comments on the zero-draft presented on 22 May 2024 during informal hybrid consultations; discussion during the Joint Working Party session, as well as comments received subsequently in writing. Comments by the Joint Bureau were published in document ECE/TIM/2024/Inf.3 and were the basis of this in-session review led by the secretariat of COFFI and EFC.

42. Delegations discussed the proposed draft and introduced several changes. All amendments will be reflected in the post-session document.

43. The Committee was informed that the post-session document will be open for comments until 1 February 2025. Draft 2 will be prepared for discussion at the Joint Working Party and be available in March 2025. The final draft of the Integrated Programme of Work would be adopted at the 2025 Joint session of COFFI and EFC.

### **B. Report of the Joint Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management**

44. The Chair of the Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (Joint Working Party) presented the report of the forty-fifth session, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland, 22-24 May 2024 and informed delegates about the decisions taken.

45. The Rapporteur of the informal task group on a possible revision of the format and timing of the Joint Working Party informed delegates on the outcomes of the meeting held on 18 October 2024. The task group remains open for participation.

46. The Committee was informed that the mandates of all the Teams of Specialist will be reviewed at the 2025 COFFI session, including focused discussions on the continuation of the mandate of the Team of Specialist on Forest Communication under ECE Terms of Reference. Austria invited delegates to participate in the upcoming meeting of that Team of Specialists in Vienna on 17-19 December.

47. The Committee:

(a) Endorsed the report of the Joint Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2024/2);

(b) Decided to request the secretariat to organize future sessions of the Joint Working Party (starting in 2026) back-to-back with COFFI or the joint sessions of COFFI and EFC (in line with the proposal presented by the task force). The secretary of EFC will inform EFC delegations of the possibility of holding the Joint Working Party in the autumn of each year, back-to-back with COFFI or the joint session. The Joint session 2025 will be informed;

(c) Thanked the task force and invited them to continue to support the secretariat in preparing the revised draft terms of reference for the 2025 Joint Working Party session;

(d) Took note of the discussions on the continuation of the Team of Specialists on Forest Communication under the ECE Terms of Reference and postponed the final decision

to the 2025 COFFI session when the mandates of all Teams of Specialists will be presented for review and possible extension.

### **C. Update on the 2025 cycle of the Global Forest Resources Assessment and Joint pan-European data collection on forests and sustainable forest management**

48. The secretariat informed delegates about progress on the FAO Global FRA 2025, providing an overview of the enhanced and extended features of the FRA reporting platform. In particular, the new geospatial modules allow for the use of satellite imagery and access to data on indicators such as tree cover, burned area and protected areas. Furthermore, the secretariat outlined the process of voluntary report updates in between regular five-year reporting cycles, methodological work on the FRA remote sensing survey and the planned outputs.

49. The secretariat also updated delegates on the 2025 Joint UNECE/FAO/Forest Europe pan-European Data Collection (JPEDC) cycle and provided an overview of the status of reporting. This included a new data-collection interface, a revised questionnaire, a guidance document and the Helsinki capacity-building workshop for national correspondents.

50. The delegate from Switzerland informed delegates about his country's support for the digitalization of data collection, processing, and dissemination, as well as the development of information technology tools and capacities.

51. The Committee:

(a) Took note on the progress made in the 2025 cycle of the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment and the Joint ECE/FAO/Forest Europe pan-European data collection on forests and sustainable forest management;

(b) Expressed appreciation for the collaborative work between countries and secretariats for both processes, stressed the need for adequate resources to continue the pan-European data collection and encouraged member States to continue this important work in collaboration with ECE, FAO and partner institutions.

### **D. Progress report on forest damages and disturbances work**

52. The secretariat updated delegates about progress on the reporting format for forest damage assessments in the ECE region. The final "Reporting on forest damages and disturbances in the UNECE region", was published and is available at <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/391138>.

53. In response to a request from COFFI and EFC at their 2023 joint session, the Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management at its April 2024 meeting (Larnaca, Cyprus) initiated work on developing "a proposal for the refinement of forest damage data collection in the ECE region as a possible contribution to international reporting". The work is currently ongoing and is led by a dedicated sub-group of the Team. The results, including a proposal for improved reporting on forest disturbance and damage in the ECE region, will be presented at the 2025 Joint session.

54. The Committee:

(a) Took note of the information provided and the possible adoption of further work at the 2025 session;

(b) Encouraged member States to provide support to this work.

## **IX. Youth, gender equality, human rights and disability inclusion in forestry**

55. The secretariat presented inclusive development and gender strategies included by countries in their market statements. Delegations informed the Committee about their youth, gender equality, human rights and disability inclusion work and strategies in forestry.

56. The Committee:

- (a) Welcomed the initiatives undertaken to promote youth, gender equality, human rights and disability inclusion in forestry;
- (b) Encouraged member States to report at the 2025 session.

## **X. Capacity-building and technical assistance**

57. Delegates were informed about the capacity-building and technical assistance activities in 2024 that included 20 capacity-building events, webinars and workshops, 4 publications and 2 training courses.

58. Special focus was given this year to presentations and discussions on non-wood forest product value chains, criteria and indicators for non-wood forest product value chain development and a related United Nations Development Account project with beneficiary countries Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The secretariat presented the project's objectives; representatives of each of the four participating countries outlined their national case studies on non-wood forest product value chains.

59. The secretariat also introduced criteria and indicator frameworks for sustainable forest management and the potential to develop such frameworks for forest products, particularly for non-wood forest products. In breakout group work, delegates discussed opportunities for strengthening the integration of non-wood forest product value chains in criteria and indicator frameworks for sustainable forest management, and highlighted the need for more information on these value chains.

60. A representative of the European Forest Genetic Resource Programme made a presentation on the role of genetic diversity in sustainable forest management. He highlighted tools that can be used to build capacity and integrate genetic resources into planning, including genetic conservation units.

61. The Committee:

- (a) Took note of the information provided and thanked donors for their continued support;
- (b) Thanked the secretariat and it to continue its capacity-building work and technical assistance and encouraged countries to provide the secretariat with funds for such current and future activities.

## **XI. Election of officers**

62. The Committee elected the following Chair and Vice-Chairs, who will hold office until the end of the eighty-third session. Chair: Mr. Tomas Krejzar (Czech Republic); and Vice-Chairs Ms. Laura Coates (Canada), and Ms. Anita Dedic (San Marino) and Mr. Peter Blombäck (Sweden). The Committee expressed its sincere gratitude to the members of the bureau and the outgoing Chair, Mr. Peter Blombäck, for their time and efforts dedicated to supporting COFFI and the secretariat.

## **XII. Date and place of the next session**

63. The Committee decided to hold the eighty-third session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry jointly with FAO European Forestry Commission. Modalities,

venue and exact time will be communicated by FAO, the lead agency and coordinator of the 2025 session. The tentative dates of the 2025 COFFI session are 4 to 7 November 2025.

### **XIII. Any other business**

64. The Committee took note that starting 2026 the name of the Division will be changed from ECE Forests, Land and Housing Division to Sustainable Land Division; the name of the Section will be changed to Forest and Bioeconomy Section and include the ECE/FAO Joint Office as well as the Trade and Nature-based Solutions Unit.

### **XIV. Adoption of report**

65. The Committee adopted the report of its eighty-second session.

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