



## High Level Policy Dialogue:

### “Sustainable Forest Management: Unlocking forest biodiversity potential”

Forests and other wooded land cover over 43.52% of the EU’s land space and they are essential for the health and wellbeing of all Europeans. Forests play a fundamental role in our economy and society, creating jobs and providing food, medicines, materials, clean water, and more. Forests are hugely important in adapting to and fighting against climate change, and they will be key in making Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 (EUR-Lex, 2021). Sustainably managing forest ecosystems is also paramount to preventing the spread of zoonotic diseases and global pandemics. A healthy future for people and the planet, therefore, depends on ensuring healthy, biodiverse, and resilient forests across Europe, and the world (Ibidem).

Meaningful reforms in the area of sustainable forest management, and building a green, healthy and resilient future with forests, can only be successful with the full engagement of all stakeholders, particularly the Youth<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the Youth, constitute a large part of the world’s population and are well placed for the development of new forms of action and activism, generating effective responses to issues of concern (FAO, 2022). Young individuals, together with youth-focused and youth-led institutions are participating in policy processes and are taking action to sustainably manage, restore and rehabilitate degraded land at all levels (Kemeh and Kabalan, 2021). After all, young people will be more exposed than others to the long-term impact of deforestation and forest degradation because of their longer life expectancy. They will have to live for quite some time with the consequences of the deteriorating forests that they may inherit (FAO, 2015).

Youth and young professionals interested in working for and contributing expertise to the forest sector can advance innovative ideas and critical ambition and skills to take up the global challenge of halting deforestation and forest degradation (FAO, 2022). Globally, when given the possibility, youth and young professionals are demonstrating that they can be the next frontier in sustainable forest management. For instance, Youth’s engagement in forest-related entrepreneurial activities in and around the Kakamega forest, in Kenya, has resulted in increased forest cover, minimized logging, and increased awareness among community members on both the need and ways to conserve the forest (Mbuvi, D. T., 2011). Activities such as tree nurseries, beekeeping, and butterfly farming were found to help in conservation because they ease pressure on the existing forest resources. Moreover, the youth carry out awareness campaigns on forest conservation; diversified their activities, as well as, mobilized resources within and outside the forest to support entrepreneurial activities that lead to effective conservation<sup>2</sup> of the Kakamega forest. The question is: How to increase meaningful inclusion, participation, and recognition of youth and young professionals in the forest sector, everywhere?

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<sup>1</sup> We consider Youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 40, as to include young professionals working for and contributing to the forest sector.

<sup>2</sup> Forest conservation is defined as all those activities that result in (i) increased forest cover; (ii) minimized logging and charcoal burning; (iii) increased agro-forestry and (iv) increased awareness among community members on the need and ways to conserve forests.



For the XV World Forestry Congress (XV WFC), with the support of the FAO and the WFC secretariat, the UNFF MGCY has been given the opportunity to lead the development of the Youth Call for Action. We run four regional consultations, which involved over 600 youth organizations and young experts from all over the world, between the age of 21 to 35, to identify the challenges and the solutions to meaningful inclusion, participation, and recognition of young people in the forest sector.

With the Youth Call for Action, the Youth asked for collaboration and support from all stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, academia, and non-governmental organizations, operating at the international, national, and local scales, within the forest sector to:

- Improve the standard of, and access to, high-quality forest education and training for Youth everywhere;
- Increase decent work and career employment opportunities;
- Achieve gender equality and empower all young women in the forest sector;
- Increase access to finance, and foster Youth participation in policy and strategy decisions, at all levels.

These are what emerged from the regional consultations as key enabling factors for elevating and strengthening the contribution, engagement, and participation of youth and young professionals in the forest sector. Young people cannot be passive witnesses of current forestry practices. Are you willing to accept the invite?



## References

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