



FOREST EUROPE High-Level Talks

High-Level Policy Dialogue 2022

Sustainable Forest Management: unlocking forest biodiversity's potential

Take-home messages

The first FOREST EUROPE High-Level Policy Dialogue, organised by the Liaison Unit Bonn (LUBo) with the support of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Germany and titled "Sustainable Forest Management: unlocking forest biodiversity's potential" aimed to reflect upon the extent to which Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) can maintain and eventually enhance forest biological diversity, while ensuring the balance with other forest ecosystem services in the pan-European region.

Our international high-level speakers acknowledged the **necessity to speed up action to maintain and enhance biological diversity in forests in the light of the climate and biodiversity twin crisis** (Bender) affecting our forest ecosystems and thus the basis for human well-being. It needs to be recognized that, concerning the status of forest biodiversity, there seem to exist two "realities", depending on which forest ecosystems and which geographic level we look at and what data is being used. Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) can contribute to mitigating climate change, conserving and enhancing biodiversity and driving a circular bioeconomy. This multifunctionality is a precondition to stabilize our forests, being more species-rich, adapted and resilient to climate change (Bender, Magnusson).

Progress is being made. The integration of biological diversity in forest management, despite being increasingly postulated, recently, has since decades been familiar to the forest sector. Recent examples, situated at the interface of research, practice and policy, aim to maintain and enhance biodiversity through active management. This is the founding principle of the [Integrate Network](#) (initiated by Germany and the Czech Republic in 2016). (Mlynář, Bender, Stamatovic) It is one of the most successful and widely accepted member states' initiatives supporting forest policy making (Mlynář). With its ever-growing network of demonstration sites, it fosters intergenerational training, education and communication purposes throughout Europe, showcasing best practice examples. (Mlynář, Stamatovic) Also important to mention is [ProSilva](#) (founded in 1989). It promotes close-to-nature-forest-management as an integrated approach on a larger scale, not excluding segregation where appropriate. The ProSilva community acts at the forest ground level, focusing on the implementation of policies and management strategies. It is characterized by continuous knowledge exchange among forest owners, foresters and other members all over Europe.

Scaling up and speeding up is indispensable. Unlocking the potential of SFM for forest biodiversity requires the full engagement of our youth and progressive minds. The **Youth Call for Action** ([see full version](#)), introduced by Erica di Girolami of the International Forestry Students' Association during the panel discussion, suggests the following actions in the context of SFM and maintenance of biodiversity: 1) access to higher quality education, 2) increase in work opportunities, 3) enhance gender equality and empowerment of women, 4) foster youth participation in policy and strategy decisions at all levels.

It also requires **policy support**. Our speakers mentioned the national subsidy schemes and the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) programs in place, which are aiming to reward forest owners and managers for the many services their forests provide for society (e.g. ecosystem protection) (Bender, Mlynář, Magnusson).

"It is the moment to shorten the time from theory to practice" declared Eckart Senitza (President of ProSilva), receiving broad approval, moving the discussion forward.

HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE 2022 TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

What are the challenges we have been facing when maintaining forest biodiversity, and how can we translate these into possible solutions?

- **Weak communication** in the field of forest protection and forest management is negatively affecting the course of the debate. Speakers underlined the need to **strengthen open, constructive dialogue and collaboration** among different stakeholders (Bender, Magnusson, Stamatovic), enabling transparent communication with the public.
- **Data availability, accessibility and sufficient timelines** for meaningful data comparison and interpretation pose a challenge that needs to be addressed. Improving this not only avoids misunderstanding and misinterpretation between stakeholders within the sector but especially towards external actors and the general public (Magnusson, Bender).
- There is also the need to **improve understanding of external factors** affecting forests and biodiversity (e.g. climate change, landscape fragmentation, atmospheric deposition, pesticides, biological invasions) as well as the difference between primary forests, that have been set-aside recently, and managed forests.
- We need to better **comprehend and broaden the discussion about the trade-offs** with the social and economic functions of forests, including payments to private forest owners.
- “Conservative thinking” in some regions is a barrier to direct the forest sector towards the future. There is the necessity to **enhance innovation in the sector**, to **think progressively**, and to increase gender inclusion and financial support to improve youth career development in Europe and beyond (di Girolami, Magnusson, Stamatovic).
- We therefore need to **broaden the education and training systems**, including life-long learning and increase the attractiveness of green jobs, as well as improve intersectoral cooperation (Bender, Mlynář).

And what is needed on the ground?

“Forest biodiversity is more than tree species only” stated Prof. Bart Muys from University Leuven in Belgium. It relates to different types of species (e.g. birds, fungi, insects etc.), creating a complex structure and interactions within the ecosystem and among each other. **Monitoring** is the tool to understand what is happening on the ground over time. In this regard, FOREST EUROPE developed suitable pioneer indicators which are continuously improved along with respective data gathering and methodology (Muys).

Natural disturbances are not only affecting forests but are destroying the social-ecological system in place. The **restoration** of European forests constitutes a challenge but is much needed, as healthy and resilient forests are part of the solution to combat changing climatic conditions. To guarantee this, private forest owners should be financially supported, ensuring their willingness to reinvest after a catastrophic disturbance (Langue).

The complexity of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity requires a careful evaluation of the type of support needed, the activities necessary, the final scope and the ability to develop **different pathways**, depending on legacies (i.e. previous management and natural disturbance regimes), local conditions, including socio-economic values of forest ecosystems. **“There is no one-size-fits-all solution”** is the statement made by various speakers (Muys, Senitz, Rodríguez de Sancho).

In local decision making, the voices of the forest owners and managers on site need to be heard in order to develop appropriate policies and strategies informed by the most recent and state of the art methodologies and knowledge available (Langue).

Strategic planning and networking among policy makers, scientists, and practitioners are necessary and need to be strengthened to jointly tackle the high-level of uncertainty we will increasingly face in the future.

Finally, there was a strong appeal to all to take immediate action as outlined. There is no need to wait for further FOREST EUROPE calls to action. FOREST EUROPE will resume to specifically focus on its mandate, continuing the work on indicators and facilitating additional cross-border and intersectoral exchange or collaboration when needed.