

04 March 2021

Economic Commission for Europe Food and Agriculture Organization
Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry European Forestry Commission

**Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on
Forest Statistics, Economics and Management
Forty-second session**

Geneva, 22-24 March 2021
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

Forests and the Circular Economy

AGENDA ITEM 4

Information document for the discussion on forests and the circular economy

Summary

This information document is prepared to facilitate discussion among member States on the future work of the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section (Joint Section) on forests and the circular economy.

The secretariat will inform the Joint Working Party on the progress of work in line with the existing mandate. This will include a presentation on the first draft of the study on how the circular economy concepts relate to the forest-based industries. In addition, the secretariat will inform the Joint Working Party on progress of work on an inventory of existing wood waste classifications and the plans for further direction of this work.

The Joint Working Party will be invited to take note of the information provided and to:

- (a) Inform the Joint Section about additional circularity questions and concepts that could be included in the study before the final draft is presented to the joint session of COFFI and EFC in October 2021.
- (b) Advise the Joint Section on the proposed direction of work towards a standard classification of wood waste streams in the ECE region.
- (c) Consider actively supporting the work on wood waste classification through engagement of national experts or funding of an extrabudgetary project.
- (d) Provide guidance on other possible directions of the Joint Section's work on forests and the circular economy after 2021.

A. Background information

1. The Joint Section's work on forests and the circular economy results from a mandate given by the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) and the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC) during their joint session in 2019 (ECE/TIM/2019/2 FO:EFC/2019/2). In line with this mandate, the Joint Section is pursuing "activities containing research and stock taking elements as well as proposals for guidance tools and recommendations for member States".
2. This work is also implementing the "List of 2020 activities and activities planned for 2021" (ECE/TIM/2020/5) under the Work Area 2 Policy Dialogue and Advice on "preparation of a stock-taking document on how the circular bio-economy concepts are related to the forest-based sector; and exploration of the issue of wood-based value chains in a circular bio-economy".
3. This information document aims to inform the discussion on "Forests and the circular economy" (Agenda item 4), during the 42nd session of the Joint Working Party (22 to 24 March 2021) in Geneva, Switzerland as outlined in the annotated agenda of the meeting (ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2020/1).

B. Status of the work

4. In line with the COFFI and EFC mandate, the Joint Section is working on a study on circular bio-economy concepts and how they relate to the forest-based industries (ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2021/Inf.4). The study features various circularity concepts and related definitions. It also analyses how these concepts can be applied to the forest-based industries and the potential opportunities and limitations which may result. The study focuses on the analysis of key forest-based value chains: (1) sawn wood, bioenergy and construction (2) furniture industry, (3) paper and pulp industry, (4) cellulose-based fibers, and (5) cellulose-based plastics.
5. The first draft of the study will be presented to the Joint Working Party. Member States will be invited to take note of the information provided and to advise on additional circularity questions and concepts that could be included in the study before the final draft is presented to the joint session of COFFI and EFC in October 2021.
6. In line with the same mandate, the Joint Section is also working on analyzing wood waste streams in forest-based value chains. This work aims to (1) take stock of existing classifications of wood waste streams¹ developed by governments and various international organizations (2) develop a standard classification for the ECE region which could serve for data collection, and (3) develop a possible practical tool which could facilitate the recycling and trade of waste streams in the region.
7. As a first stage of this work, a draft catalogue of wood waste classifications in the ECE region (ECE/TIM/EFC/WP.2/2021/Inf.5) will be presented to the Joint Working Party. The catalogue takes stock of existing international and

¹ Wood waste streams are flows of specific wood waste, from its source through to recovery, recycling or disposal, defined in annual statistical reporting by member States.

national wood waste classifications. It reveals the multitude of existing definitions, standards, regulations and classifications pertaining to wood waste streams in the ECE region. This complexity constitutes a barrier not only for data collection and market analysis but also, and foremost, for the repurposing and reuse of the arising volumes of wood waste streams in different wood-based value chains in a circular economy.

8. Member States will be invited to review the content of the catalogue as regards the information on their countries and to provide guidance on further direction of this work as proposed by the secretariat hereafter.
9. Information gathered in the catalogue can serve as background for further work by the Joint Section towards the development of a standard classification of wood waste streams in the ECE region. Such a standard classification could be developed based on the analysis of definitions and methodologies presented in the catalogue. The classification could serve as a starting point for the development of two practical tools supporting the transition of the forest sector towards a circular economy (1) an ECE/FAO questionnaire for data collection on wood waste and (2) an ECE/FAO quality standard supporting trade of wood waste streams in the ECE region.

C. Key questions for guidance and discussion

10. The Joint Working Party is invited to:
 - (a) Inform the Joint Section about additional circularity questions and concepts that could be included in the study before the final draft is presented to the joint session of COFFI and EFC in October 2021.
 - (b) Advise the Joint Section on the proposed direction of work towards a standard classification of wood waste streams in the ECE region.
 - (c) Consider actively supporting the work on wood waste classification through engagement of national experts or funding of an extrabudgetary project.
 - (d) Provide guidance on other possible directions of the Joint Section's work on forests and the circular economy after 2021.
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