

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

133rd meeting  
Geneva, 25 March 2024

Item 4(a) of the provisional agenda

Informal Document No. **2024/8**

**Meeting with the Chair  
of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry  
Report by the Chair**

## **Report by the Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry**

1. The Chair of the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Mr. Peter Blombäck (Sweden), is pleased to submit his report to the 133rd meeting of the Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 25 March 2024.

### **I. Introduction**

2. This report describes the key achievements of the Integrated Programme of Work (IPoW) 2022-2025 (ECE/TIM/2021/2– FO:EFC/2021/2), which was adopted by the joint session of the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (COFFI) and the FAO European Forestry Commission (EFC) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, Italy, on 25 November 2021. The report focuses on the main achievements of COFFI during the period from January 2023 - March 2024, as well as major activities planned for 2024 and beyond. More information is contained in the report of the eighty-first session of the ECE Committee on Forest and the Forest Industry and the forty-second session of the FAO European Forestry Commission, which was held from 20 to 24 November 2024 in San Marino, San Marino (see document ECE/TIM/2023/2– FO:EFC/2023/2).

### **II. Achievements over the past twelve months**

3. The theme of the eighty-first session of the ECE Committee on Forest and the Forest Industry, held in a joint session with the FAO European Forestry Commission in San Marino (20-24 November 2024), was “Biodiversity – Implications of the Global Framework for Biodiversity for forests in the ECE region”. Conserving biodiversity and ensuring healthy ecosystems are essential to meet the needs of present and future generations, support climate change and the sustainable development goals yet they are imperilled by current human activity. Today, 25 percent of species are threatened and an estimated 1 million species face extinction, which is tens to hundreds of times higher than the average over the past 10 million years. 75 percent of the land surface is significantly altered and over 85 percent of wetlands have been lost. At the same time, half of the global GDP depends on biodiversity and its ecosystem services.

4. Almost half of the targets of the December 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) are closely related to sustainable forest [and wildlife] management, as part of the solutions to biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and the climate crisis. With this high relevance, the implementation of the GBF targets will impact the forests in the ECE region. While it might be too early to fully assess how the implementation of GBF targets will affect member States and organizations the Committee session explored the first implications of the GBF for forests of the ECE region, presented different local and national perspectives and provided an opportunity to discuss the related current and future opportunities and challenges also in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the Paris Agreement.

5. The Triple Planetary Crisis, which embraces the three intersecting global environmental crises of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss and pollution, requires healthy and prospering forest ecosystems. While the Committee session addressed two of them, the climate crisis was at the heart of the contribution of the Forest and Forest Industry subprogramme to the COP 28 events in Dubai. Forests in the ECE region, the Northern forests, play a pivotal role in climate action, adaptation and mitigation. Forest resources and the sustainable availability of the forest’s

products are at the core of the subprogramme's work. The continued climate action relevance, health and source of sustainable resource of Northern forests depends on policy decisions based on sound data and evidence which will make it possible to substitute products ranging from plastics to fibres, construction materials and even food wrappings (see e.g. the subprogramme's events at COP-28 on "Better food-packaging for a sustainable tomorrow – the role of forests" or "Trees in dry cities: luxury or a fundamental climate and SDG solution"). The subprogramme has taken this up in its work on forest product data collection and resource assessments. Its extensive work on the forest bioeconomy and circular solutions in the ECE area, on damages and disturbances but also on assessing the state of boreal forests are essential to draw attention to the pivotal role of Northern forests on the global agendas all while cautioning about its state and limitations.

6. Every country has its own levels of forest resources and its own use thereof paired with its own pathway. Many lack forests and trees in rural and urban areas, many need assistance in reforestation or afforestation. The Committee's work in these areas, in 2023, particularly focused on the preconditions that are needed to prepare large-scale afforestation (in country context) as well as on the urban space and its link with national and regional levels. This culminated in the adoption of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan in November 2023). Collectively, and only with sustainably managed forest resources and products, can the extremely valuable forests and their ecosystem continue to stay a major asset for reaching the related objectives of the 2030 Agenda, the GBF, the Climate agenda and the Paris Agreement.

7. The work of the Committee also resonated with the focus of the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe where its work on a transition to the circular economy and the work on digitalization to green solutions via its INForest platform were presented, as well as its outputs on digitalization and forest information systems.

### III. Major activities planned for 2024 and beyond

8. The approved list of tentative 2024 activities is contained in document ECE/TIM/2023/6–FAO:EFC/2023/6.

9. Given the strategic priorities of the Committee's work programme, major activities for 2024 were strategically aligned to support member States in their efforts to meet the global climate and forest goals. Therefore, upcoming events (intergovernmental or other) include segments or focus on areas that contribute to the implementation of global, regional, national and local frameworks. Also, the upcoming review of the new Integrated Programme of Work (FAO EFC and ECE COFFI) 2026-2029 which starts in March 2024 to last until November 2025 will take this into consideration:

10. **The intergovernmental frameworks** include strong thematic focus on issues of strategic relevance including sessions on:

- Forests for Climate session - Joint ECE/FAO Working Party session;
- Deforestation-free trade session: Committee on Forest and the Forest Industry - November 2024.

11. **Issue-focused events** are centred around climate action and biodiversity mainstreaming contributing to the Rio conventions and the Paris agreements (among others); urban action (from local to national to global impact) ranging from nature based solutions to finance and addressing food security through productive trees in and around cities; fires and damages to Northern forests to future-proofing their sustainable management and relevance; data and digitalization for evidence-based

policy making in the challenging global environmental context and green transition as well as foresight -which looks into the links between forest and wood products and their availability for innovative use and substitution solutions in all areas. Examples include:

- **Climate action:**
  - International Day of Forests – Forest-based Innovations for Climate, 21 March 2024;
  - Trees in Dry Cities; May 2024 United Nations Forum for Forests (UNFF).
- **Urban action:**
  - ECE’s Trees in Dry Cities work at the Water and Drought event organized by the ECE Convention on Transboundary Water, 26 February 2024;
  - Urban Forest Finance Seminar, April 2024;
  - Workshops on the operationalization of the San Marino Regional Urban Forestry Action Plan adopted by the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry, November 2023;
  - Seminar on nature-based solutions for cities and tree-based food supply chains, June 2024.
- **Future-proofing sustainable forest management in Northern forests - Fires and damages:**
  - Preventing and controlling forest fires, training, Türkiye (Q2 TBC).
- **Foresight and forests:**
  - Resource management in light of growing demand pressures for forest products, events centered around forthcoming studies.
- **Data for evidence-based policy-making:**
  - Engineered Wood Products Statistical Definitions and Classifications, webinar, April 2024.

#### **IV. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the Committee**

12. The Committee does not propose any changes to its subsidiary structure. During its eighty-first session from 20 - 23 November 2023 in San Marino, the Committee:

- Adopted the programme of work of the Forests and the Forest Industry Subprogramme for 2024, as contained in document ECE/TIM/2023/10, FAO:EFC/2023/10;
- Approved the request by the Joint Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to extend the mandates of all Teams of Specialists until 2025, as contained in Annex II of document ECE/TIM/2021/2-FO:EFC/2021/2:
  - Team of Specialists on Boreal Forests;
  - Team of Specialists on Forest Products and Wood Energy Statistics;
  - Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management;

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- Team of Specialists on Sustainable Forest Products;
  - Team of Specialists on Forest Communication (Forest Communicators' Network).

13. The Executive Committee is invited to approve the above-mentioned decisions.

## **V. Follow-up to the 2021 and 2023 sessions of the Economic Commission for Europe**

14. During the joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management in June 2023 as well as the 81<sup>st</sup> session of COFFI, delegates were informed about the decisions adopted by the ECE at its 70th session (April 2023). Delegates expressed appreciation for the work done by COFFI since the sixty-ninth Commission session on the promotion of a circular economy. Further to decision C (70) on the “promotion of circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources”, the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section, in cooperation with other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector, has worked on a number of relevant products. These include the 2023 studies on “Circularity Concepts in Wood Construction” (<https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/37921>); “Circularity concepts in the pulp and paper industry” (publication forthcoming) as well as the “Sustainable and circular bioeconomy in forest-based industries” (publication forthcoming). This work covers practically the entire material and production chains, and includes the development of methods and tools; trainings; and communication campaigns assisting States to foster circular and more resource-efficient approaches and promoting sustainable materials, products and their use.

15. The theme of the 2023 session on “Digital and green transformations in support of the sustainable development in the ECE region” is highly relevant for the Forest and Forest Industry subprogramme as well as its programme of work. The latter has a strong focus on the collection of statistical data on the status of forests, their sustainable management, the use of forest based natural resources; as well as the analysis of past and future trends, including forest sector outlook and foresight studies.

16. Since its inception, the work of the subprogramme had been guided by the timely and accurate collection, processing and publication of data and information which for several years now has been available on the digital INForest platform. At the 70<sup>th</sup> ECE session this platform was highlighted as an important contribution to expanding the work on digital and green transformations. In addition, the implementation of the United Nations “Data Strategy of the Secretary-General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere: With Insight, Impact and Integrity” had been guiding the ECE secretariat’s work on automating data processes for the benefit of facilitating data collection, submission, processing and publication of data by member States. The Committee has taken further action in follow up to Commission decision B (70), requesting the secretariat to further strengthen the work of the Commission in support of digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region within its existing mandate as appropriate and subject to available resources”. In 2023 key achievements included an expansion of the INForest platform, the creation of a forest knowledge platform (to be released in 2024) as well as the development of the subprogramme’s data strategy and automation drive for the delivery of the mandated regular budget work.

17. These constitute also the subprogramme’s pillars to enhance digital and green transformation efforts in member States while maintaining its relevance in the international forest space. While so far fundraising efforts led by member State

donors have made it possible to support the secretariat's efforts, only a more secure allocation of regular budget (RB) resources in future budgets can sustain successfully these efforts which are highly relevant to member States, ECE and the Forest and Forest Industry's sub-programme.

18. The follow-up to the 2023 session of the Economic Commission for Europe under the Committee on Forests and Forest Industry is continuously reinforced also by the activities of its subsidiary bodies, the joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management and the Teams of Specialists. These provide platforms for creating future-proof knowledge, replicating and scaling up it up on a range of topics relevant to a circular economy and the sustainable use of forest resources as well as digitalization for a green transitions in member States.

## **VI. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities**

19. The Forest and Forest Industry subprogramme provides important opportunities for intersectoral collaboration to address the global, regional and national challenges faced by member States, international organizations, formal or informal working groups, private sector firms, academia, and scientists throughout the ECE region. The Committee's subsidiary bodies in particular, the Joint Working Party as well as its Teams of Specialists and informal groups (such as the Informal Network of Experts on Urban Nature) are at the forefront of building interfaces between the science and policy community. Some examples which highlight the relevance of this cooperation include:

- Cross-sectoral cooperation with the ECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management which culminated in the joining of forces on urban nature action and the participation of delegates from the latter in the Informal Network of Experts on Urban Nature;
- The work on nexuses, for example on the energy-forest nexus, the water-forest nexus or the food-water-energy nexus (in cities) to strengthen synergies within ECE and thereby scale up efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and other global goals;
- The work of the "ECE Task Force on measuring the circular economy" - on the conceptual monitoring framework and development of a circular economy definition.

## **VII. Technical cooperation activities**

20. Through extrabudgetary projects the ECE secretariat and the regional adviser (available temporarily in 2023) actively provided technical assistance and capacity-building support in coordination with United Nations country teams and resident agencies. Trainings were held in the programme countries as well as back-to-back with regular meetings online and in person. Such support was organized at the request of member States to support them in their green and sustainable transition and was fully aligned with the work programme as well as global climate, biodiversity, nature and forest goals. As part of the Integrated Program of work of ECE and FAO, training focused on programmatic issues and on data collection, data processing or forest information systems. In addition, capacity-building events were held in the margins of major global meetings such as UNFF or COP28 (e.g., on Why cities can help solve our climate problems; or Trees in dry cities as a fundamental climate and SDG solution; or the links between international, regional and national forest interventions).

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21. Examples such of capacity-building and technical cooperation activities include thematic focuses on e.g.:

- Climate action (22 November 2023 – How to maximize embodied carbon in residential buildings; San Marino);
- Urban action (21 November 2023 – Rethinking forests and cities, San Marino; 3 August 2023 – Advancing urban forestry-A Nature Based Solution for Local and Global Goals, 30 March 2023; the Workshop on the city of the future is a green city: why we need trees in our cities for the SDGs, Geneva, Switzerland; the training on Strategic and Technical Approaches to Urban Tree Health Protection, 26 September 2023);
- Future-proofing sustainable forest management trainings (e.g., 31 October – 2 November 2023 on the Future of reforestation – bankable project development, Uzbekistan; 12 October 2023 – Forest Landscape Restoration in the Republic of Moldova – Feasibility study on the production of forest reproductive material);
- Foresight, forests and the sustainable use of forest products (e.g., 20-23 September 2023 – Forest Policy training - The future of the forestry and wood-based industries sector in the transition to a sustainable bioeconomy in Türkiye - resource management in light of growing demand pressures for forest products);
- Data for evidence-based policy-making (e.g., 10-13 October 2023 – Regional workshop on Forest Information Systems and Global Forest Resources Assessment; Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan; 11-14 September 2023 – Regional workshop on Global Forest Resources Assessment and Joint Pan-European Data Collection, Helsinki Finland; 21 July 2023 Workshop on FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment and the Joint Pan-European Data Collection on Forests and Sustainable Forest Management; July and May 2023 – Workshop on Forest Information Management and Forest Information Systems, Uzbekistan and in Kyrgyzstan; 17-27 April 2023 - Capacity building webinar on the Joint Wood Energy Enquiry- 3 online course modules).

## VIII. Cooperation with other organizations

22. The Committee's programme of work is also implemented via an Integrated Programme of Work jointly with FAO. This long-standing cooperation reinforces stakeholder engagement, scope, impact and outreach. It is formalized via a Partnership Agreement between ECE and FAO and a Joint ECE/FAO secretariat (ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section) hosted by ECE. The Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section (Joint Section) works consistently and effectively with several other international organizations at international, national, regional and local levels to reinforce impact and delivery and create economies of scale and resource savings. Cooperation is strategically aligned with support for the work programme implementation, but also the global agendas and related challenges to support member States within an optimal use of resources and shared agendas. Some of the 2023 highlights included:

- **European Forest Alliance:** established at the 2022 COFFI session, the European Forest Alliance (currently chaired by ECE) is an informal mechanism enabling exchanges on current developments and coordinating joint work of all major European Forest organizations (ECE, FAO, European Forest Institute Integrate Network (EFI Integrate Network), European Environment Agency (EEA), and Forest Europe). In 2023, the Alliance held two consultative meetings and worked jointly on the development of biodiversity indicators in forest reporting in support of the implementation of

the Global Biodiversity Framework;

- **Cooperation with the secretariats of the three Rio Conventions (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** to enhance impact and relevance of the Committee’s work in light of the triple planetary crisis and highlight the important role of forest in addressing these challenges;
- **Pan-European reporting on forests and sustainable forest management:** A collective effort of ECE, FAO and the Forest Europe process, it includes technical guidance and trainings of national statistical contributors from Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and processing and disseminating the collected data. At the global level ECE cooperates with FAO through the Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) – an initiative of regional organizations (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Forest Europe, Montreal Process, Central African Forest Commission and the International Tropical Timber Organization);
- **Intersecretariat Working Group on Forest Sector Statistics:** ECE coordinated the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire amongst the 4 participating organizations: ECE/FAO, Eurostat, International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and FAO. The data were provided to the Intersecretariat member organizations and published keeping in mind the aim of producing the best forest products statistics possible with optimized resource use;
- **UN Country teams and resident agencies such as UNDP,** on capacity-building, particularly in Central Asia (Uzbekistan where a Joint capacity-building project development with UNDP is in progress) and the Caucasus region;
- **Forest Europe Liaison Unit Bonn:** ECE contributes to many activities of the Forest Europe Work Programme, including the joint ECE/FAO/Forest Europe Forest data collection and support to a report on the State of Europe’s Forests as well as joint development of the interactive data platforms;
- **International Energy Agency (IEA), FAO and the European Commission (EC)** on the “Joint Wood Energy Enquiry”, for improved understanding of wood energy production and consumption and joint assessment of the future prospects for wood energy in the ECE region;
- **Steering Committee of the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion:** ECE promoted the use of sustainable forest fibers in the garment sector in meetings. Members of the Steering Committee include representatives from: the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, International Trade Centre, FAO, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Office for Partnerships (UNOP), International Labour Organization (ILO) and Global Compact;
- Cooperation on monitoring of forest resources and sustainable forest management: in cooperation with Forest Europe, the European Union (i.e., Eurostat, the European Environment Agency, and the Joint Research Centre), and other organizations (i.e., the Confederation of European Forest Owners, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations, the European Forest Institute, and European State Forest Association) in this area.