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Joint ECE/FAO Working Party on Forest Statistics,

Economics and Management

Forty-fourth session

Geneva, 31 May – 2 June 2023

Item 11 of the provisional agenda

Adoption of the report

Report of the forty-fourth session 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

I. Introduction

1. The Joint Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Working Party on Forest Statistics, Economics and Management (henceforth referred to as the Joint Working Party) held its forty-fourth session from 31 May to 2 June 2023. Meeting documents as well as presentations (whose content and conclusions are not part of this report) are available at: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/events/374851>.
2. The meeting was opened by Ms. Magdalena Wolicka-Posiadala, Poland, Chair of the Joint Working Party.
3. Ms. Paola Deda, Director of the Forests, Land and Housing Division, ECE, welcomed delegates on behalf of both ECE and FAO in the renovated historical Palais des Nations in Geneva. She highlighted the tasks ahead for the Joint Working Party which included giving guidance for the next years based on the important achievements of the past. She highlighted the plans to improve data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination as well as the crucial role of the Joint Working Party in defining the review process of the joint Programme of Work. She thanked member States for their excellent cooperation.

II. Attendance

4. Delegations from the following member States participated in the meeting: Austria, Canada, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.
5. The following United Nations agency participated in the session: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).



6. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the session: Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK) and European Organization of the Sawmill Industry.

7. Representatives of the following academic institutions were present: Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) and Thünen Institute.

III. Adoption of the agenda

8. The Joint Working Party adopted the agenda.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

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

9. The Director of the ECE Forests, Land and Housing Division highlighted the many events organized since the last session of the Joint Working Party, including the successful November 2022 session of the ECE Committee on Forests (COFFI), the March 2023 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and its ECE side event on “The city of the future is a green city: why we need trees in our cities for the SDGs”, and the 21 March 2023 International Day of Forests’ social media campaign on “Forests as Pharmacy” with a spotlight on forestland as an invaluable source of plant-based medicines. She also mentioned the establishment of the informal European Forest Alliance among 5 secretariats, initiated last year at the Joint Working Party and endorsed by COFFI in November 2022.

10. She reviewed the 70th session of the Economic Commission for Europe (April 2023), noting the appreciation expressed by delegations for the work done since the 2021 ECE session on the promotion of a circular economy. She highlighted decision C (70) adopted at the 2023 session on the “promotion of circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources”, which aims at: strengthening work on the impact of relevant existing ECE instruments; replicating and scaling up existing approaches; developing effective and measurable solutions promoting a circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources; and invites relevant subsidiary bodies, the secretariat and member States to continue their efforts and to explore synergies between circular economy works and digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region.

11. The theme of the 2023 session of “Digital and green transformations in support of the sustainable development in the ECE region” led to the adoption of the following decisions of relevance to the work of the Joint Working Party and COFFI (B (70)): Further strengthening 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; requesting the relevant Sectoral Committees and bodies to enhance the impact of relevant existing ECE instruments, for digital and green transformations, including by proposing ways to identify, assess and fill gaps in governance and good practices; inviting subsidiary bodies to replicate and scale up existing approaches including through capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities; inviting subsidiary bodies to consider developing proposals in their respective programmes of work, including collaboration across sub-programmes, for impactful and measurable solutions that promote digital and green transformations and attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; requesting the secretariat to promote partnerships related to digital and green transformations, including within the United Nations system, other international organizations, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector, to explore opportunities for synergies to broaden the use of relevant ECE instruments; requesting the secretariat to develop new capacities, subject to availability of resources, to assist the digital and green transformations in the ECE region; and requesting a progress report on those efforts at its next session.

12. In this respect, she also highlighted the importance of the implementation of the United Nations “Data Strategy of the Secretary General for Action by Everyone, Everywhere:

With Insight, Impact and Integrity” which has been guiding the ECE secretariat’s work on automating data processes for the benefit of easing data collection, submission, processing and publication of member States data; and the expansion of the INForest platform as the core part of the secretariat data strategy for the delivery of the mandated regular budget work. She invited member States to advise the ECE on possible directions and to help with necessary fund-raising to ensure the long-term financial support for development and maintenance costs.

B. Recent developments in other organizations

13. The FAO representative reported on important developments and meetings since the last Joint Working Party session. He presented key outcomes of the 26th session of the FAO Committee on Forestry (COFO26) which was held in Rome, Italy, 3-7 October 2022. The presentation included key findings of the State of the World’s Forests (SOFO 2022), the outcomes of the XV World Forestry Congress including the Ministerial Call on Sustainable Wood, multiple linkages between the agriculture and forestry sectors, ongoing improvements of the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) process, the role of Regional Forestry Commissions in the policy process and the implementation of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030.

14. He also provided a brief update on the FAO Framework for Forestry (2024–2031) process, which was initiated early in 2023 and is expected to be approved in 2024 after several reviews, including by the European Forestry Commission in November 2023, during the joint session of the European Forestry Commission (EFC) and COFFI.

15. The Joint Working Party took note of the information provided by the secretariats of ECE and FAO. Delegations commended the secretariat for its work stressing its relevance for the promotion of sustainable forest management, as well as global processes such as the United Nations Global Forest Goals and Targets of the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2030 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event organized by the secretariat at the May 2022 session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) was particularly highlighted as an example of the many synergies between the local, national, regional and global levels.

V. Rules of Procedure for the Joint Working

16. The Joint Working Party agreed not to adopt its own Rules of Procedure and be governed by the Rules of Procedure of its parent body, the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry.

VI. Thematic focus

A. Forest damage

17. The secretariat and an expert from the Forest and Natural Resources Research Centre, Poland, informed delegates about progress made in the ongoing project to “Improve capacities of the UNECE member States on assessing forest damage/disturbance in the UNECE region”. Presenters highlighted the main results of the draft publication, which included, (i) conceptual foundations, (ii) an overview of forest damage reporting in the region, (iii) coverage and methodologies of forest damage in national reporting, and (iv) innovative tools to enhance data analysis and interpretation. The secretariat summarized provisional key conclusions and outlined possible next steps to refine international data collection on forest damage. The secretariat acknowledged the support provided by Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany and the United States, as well as by international and national experts on the topic, which was essential for the implementation of the project.

18. Delegates underlined the importance of this topic and pointed to increased forest damage, as well as implications for the wood industry and forest ecosystem services. They

stressed that knowledge of forest damage had essential importance for forest management and protection. They also noted that in addition to the environmental and economic context, forest damage was an important topic for societies, and this should be considered when reporting systems are refined. The role of active forest management in this context was also highlighted.

19. Delegates noted that other organizations also worked on forest damage; cooperation with them was important. They also encouraged the ECE/FAO Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management to liaise with the Team of Specialists on Wood Products and Energy Statistics when continuing the work on the topic.

20. The Joint Working Party took note of the information provided and expressed appreciation for the work accomplished and the results of the project. The Joint Working Party invited the secretariat and the Team of Specialists on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management to develop a proposal for the refinement of forest damage data collection, and a policy brief on forest damage/disturbance in the ECE region.

B. Wood energy

21. The secretariat reported on its work on wood energy and highlighted the successful cooperation with international organizations and expert groups on energy, renewable energy and solid biomass. The secretariat presented an overview of the procedural steps for the successful launch of the collection of the wood energy data for the reference year 2021 via the Joint Wood Energy Enquiry (JWEE). The secretariat thanked Canada for the financial support, which allowed the organization of a series of online training webinars to improve capacities of countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia and high-quality data on wood energy sources and users. The secretariat previewed planned activities related to the 2021 wood energy data analysis.

22. An expert from the Thünen Institute (Germany) presented the preliminary results of the JWEE for the reference year 2021 and highlighted that the response rate was lower than in previous rounds, but that the datasets submitted were more thoroughly completed. In particular, the data availability of wood energy from wood processing industries seemed to have improved significantly and the information on post-consumer recovered wood had increased slightly. The current dataset of the JWEE for the reference year 2021 indicated that reporting countries consumed a total of 370 million m³ of wood resources for energy generation. He highlighted that the largest wood energy consuming sectors were the residential sector (42%), the industrial sector (27%) and the power and heat sector (26%). The trend assessment over the years was possible thanks to the continued submission of data from the following 12 countries in the past five rounds of data collection covering 10 years in total: Austria, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland. The secretariat informed member States that it was still possible to submit JWEE data for 2021.

C. Draft regional urban forestry opportunity plan

23. The secretariat presented the draft regional urban forestry opportunity plan, (a voluntary plan developed under a project) highlighting the key benefits of urban tree and forest cover at both the local and national levels and the important role of national policy to support a systemic approach to sustainably manage and expand urban and peri-urban tree cover at the national level. A systemic approach is necessary for it to become a nature-based solution for sustainable development, biodiversity, climate action, disaster risk reduction, and other local, national, and global goals.

24. The Joint Working Party took note of the information provided and supported the Draft Urban Forestry Opportunities Plan and its presentation for adoption at the 2023 session of the COFFI. Several delegations voiced their support for the plan and provided technical comments which will be incorporated into a post-session document available at: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/events/374851>. Further consultations will be organized, if necessary, prior to the 2023 COFFI session.

D. Digital transformation of forest data collection, processing and dissemination

25. The secretariat informed delegates about its data strategy and related work, including opportunities for improvement. This included a modernized approach to data collection through the development of a tailored central data platform; the platform would allow some degree of automatic data exchange based on a standard application programming interface (API). The secretariat said that its efforts would initially focus on a data platform for processing and storing Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire (JFSQ) data and automated exchange with member States via an API, noting that additional funding was needed to support the development and maintenance of this platform and the API for the JFSQ and other datasets managed by the secretariat. The secretariat stressed that an option to continue Excel-based reporting would be maintained, with the more automated approaches remaining voluntary.

26. Following the presentation by the Secretariat, representatives from Czechia, Finland, Germany, Poland and Switzerland presented national experiences.

27. Germany outlined the data collection and validation of wood resource monitoring in Germany, including the linkages to forest sector reporting. He highlighted existing practices and future opportunities to increase automation in the process, including data sharing via API.

28. Poland presented the data collection, management and dissemination on forest management in Poland, explaining how the national Forest Databank had helped to standardize data on forests. He also noted that data was collected and checked once a year. He highlighted the capabilities of the data-sharing internet portal and mobile application, which both included granular geographical data.

29. Switzerland outlined the Swiss Open Government Data Platform, and the fully automated data collection, management and dissemination in the country. He highlighted the capabilities of the platform, which included charts and graphs with the most up-to-date data. He emphasized that the key to this approach was a harmonized data model which was also needed at the international level, including during the possible automation of JFSQ data collection and dissemination. He noted that once in place, automated systems allowed for a greater focus on data quality and fulfilling the increasing demand for more up-to-date data.

30. Czechia presented the various tools used for collecting and publishing forest sector data which included PDF files, web applications as well as the data collection for the JFSQ. He highlighted the “Facts on Forests” data-visualization tool and its use and features in Czechia, noting that it was selected because of its ability to publish all forest data on a single, simple-to-use platform in a user-friendly format.

31. Finland (Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners of Finland (MTK)) presented information on API's application in market analysis by the MTK, highlighting their importance in unlocking efficiencies by replacing Excel-based data-collection processes and analysis. He summarized the approach used by MTK to develop APIs, emphasizing the need for both forest sector and software development expertise. He also highlighted a gap in API-based availability of information on the international wood market in Europe and beyond.

32. During interactive working group discussions that were moderated by the presenters, the Joint Working Party highlighted the following points:

(a) Data originates from many sources and levels of government. Collection and storage are not always systemic or efficient owing to heterogeneous datasets. Confidentiality can become a problem, particularly at the disaggregated level;

(b) Countries could automate data exchange in the coming years, and there is interest for increasing automated exchange at the national level. Coordination and standardization are challenges which need to be addressed;

(c) Excel-table based JFSQ reporting could be fully phased out, but it will take time. The ability to import and export from Excel, linked to automated functions during the reporting process, would remain a need, as it can be useful for ad hoc data analysis;

(d) Ideal features for an online platform should include a user-friendly dashboard for checking with automated elements such as conversion factors. The functionalities of Excel should be maintained;

(e) Standardization based on agreed common definitions, language and protocols is critical to ensure an inclusive approach. A roadmap is needed, and the development process of automated exchanges should include national experts. A level playing field should include an Excel-based option for reporting.

33. The Joint Working Party requested the secretariat to summarize the notes of the group discussions on digital transformation as a post-session document.

34. The Joint Working Party provided feedback on the secretariat's data strategy and related work and member States took note of the request to consider providing the required financial or in-kind resources.

35. The Joint Working Party agreed to ask heads of delegation to nominate a national focal point for consultation by the secretariat during the scheduled implementation of its data strategy and related work.

VII. Guidance on work areas

36. The secretariat and a representative from each of the Teams of Specialists presented activities completed in each of the four work areas since the 2022 Joint Working Party meeting.

A. Work Area 1: Data, monitoring, reporting and assessment

1. Forest Resources

37. The secretariat informed delegates about the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment 2025 and progress made for the 2025 Joint ECE/FAO/Forest Europe Pan-European Data Collection (JPEDC) on forests and sustainable forest management. The secretariat outlined the new digital interface developed for national data submission and presented the next steps in the preparatory process. The work has been implemented according to schedule, with the support of the Governments of Sweden and Switzerland. However, the continuation of the process depends on additional funding.

38. The secretariat also briefed delegates about the reporting on forest ownership in the ECE region. Continuation of this reporting, carried out every 10 years, would require preparations for a third cycle in 2025.

39. The leader of the ToS on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management presented an overview of its activities in this reporting period. He highlighted the involvement of the Team in events and meetings as well as projects, especially in the project "Assessing forest damage/disturbance in the UNECE region", and informed delegates about the planned outputs of the Team for the coming year.

40. Delegates voiced their appreciation of the progress made and the results achieved, indicating the importance of reporting coordination, particularly for reducing the reporting burden at the national level and improving the consistency of reported data. The newly developed interface was perceived as a milestone in the facilitation of this reporting and provided a solid foundation for the improved management and dissemination of historic and recently collected data.

41. Delegates underlined that given the broad scope of the JPEDC, countries might need more time for the preparatory work. They also highlighted the current importance of e.g., forest naturalness, forest restoration and forest biodiversity, covered by the FRA and the JPEDC. Reporting should also consider work done by other organizations/processes.

42. The secretariat noted that the deadlines and the funding issues would be discussed among the process partners; and highlighted the complex nature of the JPEDC, which covered only data collection, while other processes (extent, scope, analysis, dissemination) were with Forest Europe.

43. Delegates highlighted the importance of the involvement of all partners of the JPEDC process in follow-up discussions, e.g., at the November 2023 joint session of EFC/COFFI.

44. The Joint Working Party:

(a) Took note of the various databases and websites available, such as the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment data platform, the Joint ECE/FAO/Forest Europe pan-European database, the ECE/FAO INForest knowledge platform, and the ECE Statistical Database, and encouraged member States to continue to support their development;

(b) Took note of the work done on the preparations for the current (2025) cycle of the JPEDC and the FRA;

(c) Expressed appreciation for the new online tools for the facilitation of the global and the pan-European forest data collection and underlined the importance of extrabudgetary resources to fully benefit from them in the implementation of the 2025 JPEDC;

(d) Voiced concern about insufficient resources and underlined the importance of the availability of regular budgetary resources for the long-term data-related work in the Joint Section;

(e) Took note of the work and proposed activities of the ToS on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management;

(f) Invited the Team to initiate preparatory work for the next cycle of reporting on forest ownership in the ECE region;

(g) Made recommendations for continuing work under its mandate.

2. Forest products and wood energy statistics

45. The secretariat presented the results of the work on forest products and wood energy statistics over the reporting period. This included a presentation on updates to the JFSQ for 2022 data, defined at the 36th meeting of the Inter-secretariat Working Group on Forest Sector Statistics, highlighting the inclusion of new product codes for four engineered wood products: laminated veneer lumber, glulam, cross-laminated timber, and I-beams.

46. The secretariat informed delegates that it planned to send the Timber Forecast Questionnaire by 31 August 2023 and that the deadline for replies would be 2 October 2023.

47. The leader of the ToS on Forest Products and Wood Energy Statistics presented an overview of the activities of the Team in the reporting period. He invited the Working Party and the ToS on Monitoring Sustainable Forest Management to take note of the results of the Questionnaire on Removals Statistics and the work to strengthen and disseminate wood energy statistics to better respond to policy questions. He noted growing interest among member States on statistics of post-consumer wood waste, wood by-products, wooden houses, and input-output flows on the wood market.

48. The co-coordinator (Czechia) of the ad hoc task group on removals statistics of the ToS on Forest Products and Wood Energy Statistics provided a technical presentation of the results of the questionnaire on removals statistics.

49. The team leader and the coordinator of the ad hoc task group on wood energy statistics (United States) of the ToS on Forest Products and Wood Energy Statistics outlined its work on how to better use information from the JWEE to inform policy and decision makers. The ToS had asked the ad hoc task group on wood energy statistics to summarize the results and possible application of the evaluation of wood energy statistics for consideration and feedback by member States.

50. Delegates supported the ad hoc task group work modality and encouraged the secretariat and the ToS to continue efforts to align the Harmonized System trade classification codes with the JFSQ. Delegates highlighted that non-stem wood was a

challenge for statistics on removals and noted potential linkages between the work of the ad hoc task group on removals and the work of Eurostat on environmental accounts. While the May UNECE deadline for JFSQ replies was consistent with previous years, delegates noted the impact of the new Eurostat JFSQ deadline in June rather than September. The secretariat advised that the deadline for Country Market Statements was 26 October 2023.

51. The Joint Working Party:

(a) Welcomed the Team's proposal of the ad hoc task group on removals and the ad hoc task group on wood energy statistics to develop a summary of findings for possible presentation to the 2023 COFFI session or the 2024 Joint Working Party;

(b) Confirmed the two-year cycle of the data collection on wood energy as appropriate. The next data collection process on wood energy data will be launched at the end of 2024 to collect data for the reference year 2023;

(c) Welcomed the availability of detailed country-level wood energy data on the ECE website;

(d) Took note of the ad hoc task group on wood energy statistics and requested the secretariat to ensure cooperation and communication between the various Teams of Specialists when conducting more analytical work on the implications of wood energy supply and consumption, including linkages to the management of forest resources;

(e) Took note of the JFSQ and Timber Forecast Questionnaire reporting deadlines and updates to the structure and name of the Joint Forest Sector Questionnaire.

3. Forest products markets

52. The secretariat informed the Joint Working Party about the self-evaluation of the Forest Products Annual Market Review conducted in 2022 and highlighted its recommendations and their possible implications for future work in forest products market analysis. One recommendation focused on whether ECE resources used to produce a translated and printed publication could be used more effectively. The proposed new format should be more inclusive and raise awareness on human rights and gender aspects in the forest sector.

53. The deputy leader of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Forest Products presented its work over the past year and highlighted some planned activities for the coming year. The ToS and its members are instrumental for the preparation of the Forest Products Annual Market Review and the yearly COFFI Market Discussions. The deputy leader of the ToS noted the members' guidance on the forest sector in circular economy publications and the team's willingness to collaborate with other Teams and ECE bodies.

54. The secretariat outlined its proposed reform of the Forest Products Annual Market Review as a response to the self-evaluation. This includes publishing some chapters of the review as short stand-alone data briefs throughout the year. These short briefs could present past, current and anticipated trends promoted in press releases and social media to increase outreach. The secretariat invited member States to provide guidance on the selected commodities and markets and urged them to consider providing sufficient resources to the secretariat to sustain the analytical work on forest products markets. The secretariat also highlighted its cross-sectoral work on low carbon construction.

55. The Joint Working Party confirmed the Forest Products Annual Market Review as one of the core outputs of the Programme of Work and expressed support for publishing three of the commodity assessments as short data briefs. The Joint Working Party agreed that "sawn softwood, wood energy, and pulp and paper" should be the three topics of the pilot data briefs in 2023. The Joint Working Party invited the secretariat to provide an overview on web downloads of the data briefs, the Annual Market Review and the Country Market Statements. The Joint Working Party invited member States to provide support to the secretariat for the assessment of forest products markets.

B. Work Area 2: Policy dialogue and advice

1. Circular economy

56. The secretariat informed the Joint Working Party of the work on forests in a circular economy since its previous session, including the current mandates, progress of work and planned activities. The secretariat also recalled the results of the group work which took place during the 2022 Joint Working Party session and how this informed the ongoing and planned activities of the Joint ECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section. Delegations commended the Secretariat on its work.

57. The Joint Working Party:

- (a) Took note of the activities and publications presented;
- (b) Supported the direction of the ongoing and planned work;
- (c) Pointed to the importance of wood use in a circular economy and the specific nature of wood as a raw material in its consideration of the circular economy in relation to recycling, downcycling and cascading use; and
- (d) highlighted the role of sustainable forest management in the process of wood production.

2. Boreal forests

58. The secretariat informed delegates of the work on boreal forests since the previous Joint Working Party session and highlighted the development of the policy brief “Boreal Forests and Climate Change – From Impacts to Adaptation” (available in English, French, Russian), as well as related press releases and communication material.

59. The secretariat informed the Joint Working Party of the main activities for 2023/2024, specifically the project-funded scoping study on boreal forests. The secretariat presented a draft of the study and noted that the goals included better communication of the importance of boreal forests beyond the forest sector and outreach to the general public.

60. The Joint Working Party took note of the activities and the policy brief.

C. Work Area 3: Communication and outreach

61. The Chief of the Joint UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section presented the Joint Section’s ongoing communication and outreach work, highlighting social media campaigns, the Forest Billboard, “The UN Forest Podcast” and the short film “Why Trees?” and the other events organized. She also updated the Working Party on the “Trees in Cities Challenge” and on planned communication activities for 2024, particularly on urban- and climate-change related work.

62. The Team of Specialists on Forest Communication submitted a written report but did not present its work at the session.

63. Delegations expressed their appreciation for the secretariat’s work, which had been very successful in placing the ECE region’s forest agenda at global events. This work been made possible largely through the financial contribution of the delegation of Switzerland.

64. The Joint Working Party agreed to expand the secretariat’s work on communication and outreach by actively making use of its social media channels and sending inputs to the Forest Information Billboard and other outlets.

65. The Joint Working Party requested the secretariat to organize a survey for member States and the ToS to establish, with the support of member States, thematic communication opportunities to increase its outreach and access to more sustainable funding.

66. The Working Party requested the ToS on Forest Communication to actively promote the work and products elaborated under the Integrated Programme of Work 2022-2025.

D. Work Area 4: Capacity-building

67. The secretariat informed the Joint Working Party about its capacity-building activities since the previous session, including 32 events involving 1361 participants. Among them were a study “Reporting on Forests and Sustainable Forest Management in the Caucasus and Central Asia” (March 2023); a study on forest reproductive material for forests landscape restoration in the Republic of Moldova; the development and upcoming release of a Forest Landscape Restoration Knowledge Platform on initiatives in the Caucasus and Central Asia; capacity-building activities on urban trees and forests, including the Trees in Cities Challenge; the Informal Network of Experts on Sustainable Urban Forestry and the development of the “Trees for Resilient Green Cities: Strategic Screening and Action Toolkit”; and webinars organized on the JFSQ and the JWEE with the support of Canada.

68. The secretariat informed the Joint Working Party about planned capacity-building activities for 2023/2024, including a regional workshop on forest information systems in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia; a guide on forest information systems; capacity-building workshops on (i) forest landscape restoration in the Republic of Moldova; (ii) the 2025 Global Forest Resources Assessment and Pan-European Data Collection, as well as (iii) circular value chains for forest products; and (iv) meetings of the Informal Network of Experts on Sustainable Urban Forestry.

69. The Joint Working Party took note of the capacity-building work, emerging needs, the need to further strengthen the secretariat’s capacity-building efforts and for additional funding opportunities, and the involvement of member States in capacity-building work.

VIII. Overview on forest and forest sector related work by the Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations that are not covered by the Integrated Programme of Work

70. ECE and FAO, in line with their governance structures, presented an overview of their forest-related work in the region.

71. The secretary of the ECE Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management outlined the Committee’s work and publications promoting sustainable housing, urban development and smart sustainable cities. The Joint Working Party took note of the many possible synergies with that Committee. The increased interest in better urban planning for the green and blue infrastructure and low carbon construction could be interfaces for increased cooperation and exchange of information.

72. A secretariat member from the ECE Sustainable Energy Division reported on the synergies of the Group of Experts on Renewable Energy work with wood energy and forests-related topics. He informed the Joint Working Party about the various studies and events organized by the group and highlighted its recent focus on support to Ukraine to improve the use of renewable energy. The Joint Working Party took note of the regular contribution to the renewable energy status report by REN21 and indicated that this could be an opportunity for improved cooperation.

73. A secretariat member from the ECE Environment Division presented the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention). He noted that the Convention has been opened to United Nations Member States from outside the ECE region. He highlighted that the Convention applied the water-food-energy-ecosystems nexus in several transboundary watercourses in the ECE region. Unsustainable use of wood energy was found to be a major socioeconomic and environmental issue. The Convention welcomes increased cooperation on forest-related matters; the Joint Working Party was invited to participate in and contribute to the meeting of the Task Force on Water-Food-Energy-Ecosystems Nexus on 7-8 December 2023 (<https://unece.org/info/events/event/374658>). He noted that there was an opportunity for a dedicated event on e.g. sustainable forest management as a nature-based solution in transboundary basins.

74. A representative from the ECE Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution informed delegates about recent developments under the Air Convention, emphasizing the effects of air pollution on forests (ICP Forests). She highlighted the cooperation with forest-sector agencies FAO and Forest Europe. In 2022, ICP Forests successfully became involved in two European Commission research programmes, “Pathfinder” (<https://www.nibio.no/en/projects/pathfinder>) and “ForWards” (<https://forwards-project.eu>). The Working Party took note of the work and possible synergies with the assessment of forest damages related to drought and natural effects on forests. The Joint Section confirmed that they will cooperate with the Convention to discuss how to streamline information on cause, pressure and effects of forest damage.

75. A secretariat member from the ECE Environment Division provided an update on the latest Environmental Performance Reviews (EPRs). In his presentation, he briefly outlined the structure of the forestry and environment chapter and stressed that SDG targets 2.5, 6.6, 15.1, 15.2 and 15.4 were the most relevant for forests in the context of the EPRs. In 2022, EPRs were launched for Armenia, Azerbaijan and the Kyrgyz Republic, with the latter having a chapter on forests.

76. A secretariat member from the ECE Statistics Division provided an update on environment-related activities of the Division. In his presentation, he focused on SDG Statistics, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting, measuring circular economy, climate change-related statistics, disaster-related statistics and ECE Guidelines for the Application of Environmental Indicators.

77. A representative of the FAO Subregional Office for Central Asia and FAO Representation in Türkiye provided an overview of FAO’s regional forestry work, outside of the Integrated Programme of Work. The presentation included both normative and operational forestry project work, the regional and subregional challenges and priorities. Delegations requested FAO to make available sufficient resources to the Joint Section for the implementation of the Integrated Programme of Work.

78. The Joint Working Party took note of the forest- and wood-related activities of ECE subprogrammes outside the scope of the Integrated Programme of Work and welcomed the coordination of the various ECE Divisions with the Joint Working Party.

IX. Integrated Programme of Work review process

79. The Director of the Forests, Housing and Land Management Division provided the background information for the need to review the Integrated Programme of Work and presented three options for conducting the review of the current Integrated Programme of Work to be organized in 2024 which were (i) secretariat-organized hybrid workshop(s) (ii) an external evaluation and draft Integrated Programme of Work prepared by the secretariat or (iii) a self-evaluation and review by the secretariat.

80. Delegates indicated their preference for one (or two) secretariat-organized hybrid workshops for member States and stakeholders. The Joint Working Party requested the secretariat to transmit this preference to the November 2023 Joint session of COFFI and EFC and provide further details on the workshops.

X. Election of officers

81. The meeting elected Mr. Michal Synek (Czechia) as Chair, and Ms. Magdalena Wolicka-Posiadała (Poland) and Mr. Talha Sadiq (Canada) as Vice-Chairs until the end of the forty-fifth session.

XI. Date and place of next meeting

82. The Joint Working Party decided to hold the forty-fifth session of the Joint Working Party from 5-7 June 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland, as an in-person meeting.

XII. Any other business

83. None at the time of writing.

XIII. Adoption of the report

84. The Joint Working Party adopted the report of its session and requested the secretariat to have it translated and published on the secretariat's website.
