



European Network of Forested Regions views on the EU's future forest related policy initiatives

Established in 2012, ERIAFF is an informal network of regions that seeks to promote collaborations for the development of the interregional dimension of the European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability (EIP-AGRI).

The European Network of Forested Regions is the ERIAFF thematic group that brings together regions and forestry operators committed to promote innovation in forest-based sectors. It is also a platform to provide information, and to coordinate the feedback on upcoming EU initiatives relevant for regions interested in the forest sector.

Despite forest policy not being within the jurisdiction of the European Union, the EU has, in recent years, undertaken numerous policy initiatives which have had an impact on forests and forestry in the member states. The European Network of Forested Regions emphasises that supporting and maintaining the multiple ecosystem services forests provide lays the foundation for sustainable forest management in the EU, where around 45 % of the land area is covered by forests and other wooded land. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to sustainability where the social and economic benefits of forests are given a fully equal importance with their invaluable ecological aspects, such as nature-based solutions for protecting people and infrastructures, the capacity to sequester CO₂ as well as the role of natural areas for public health, should be integrated in all of the EU's forest related policies.

The forest-based sector is not just a traditional industry; it is an expanding field of opportunity that employed 3,6 million Europeans in 2021. The European Network of Forested Regions welcomes the political guidelines of the new Commission and believes that multifunctional forests and sustainable forestry play a key role in supporting the competitiveness, security and green innovation in the EU. The recent report on the future of the European competitiveness by Mario Draghi further underlines the urgent need for the EU to rethink ways to boost these objectives, calling for simplification of business to promote the EU's overall economy.

Let us commit to a future where Europe truly grows with its forests, fostering an environment where nature together with urban and rural communities prosper together in building a true sustainable and biobased circular economy.

The European Network of Forested Regions views in brief

- **Currently, many of the EU's forest-related initiatives are not communicating well with each other.** There is an urgent need for improved policy coordination in the EU's preparatory processes which would in turn enhance interconnectedness and decrease controversy and fragmentation between the multiple initiatives. The EU should also ensure that the regional



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dimensions and differences of forest targets, interests and culture are taken into account when setting up EU-wide policies related to forests, and draw on the knowledge, innovations, and expertise about forests from the regions in these decision-making processes.

- **The opportunities of both sustainable forest-based resources and services (such as nature-based tourism, health and well-being services) should be given particular attention in the upcoming revision of the EU's Bioeconomy Strategy.** The EU needs a competitive forest-based sector to reach the full potential of our innovative European circular and biobased economy, while supporting resource efficiency through innovatively valorizing forest-based goods, like lignin in the chemical industry.
- The recent geopolitical unrest caused by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has underscored the importance of self-sufficiency both in critical materials and energy. **The European forests provide a secure, sustainable, and domestic alternative for the supply of these vital sources, reinforcing our autonomy and resilience in turbulent times.**
- **Vibrant regions play a key role in a comprehensive approach to security.** The role of forestry is crucial especially for the sparsely populated border regions of Europe, where the sector helps to secure the economic vitality and inhabitation of the regions through employment and investments. The EU should therefore safeguard a stable and coherent policy environment which increases, not decreases, the ability of European forest holders to practice sustainable forestry while contributing to the security of the regions and of Europe.
- **Fostering the use of durable wood-based products with a long life span can support climate change mitigation with their carbon storage capacity and by offering a permanent replacement for fossil raw materials.** Here, forestry sector is part of the solution.
- **Mitigating the harmful effects of climate change to the European forests is a matter of urgency to the forestry sector.** Additional EU funds are needed for prevention measures against natural hazards arising from climate change, in particular forest fires and droughts, field testing and research to improve forest health and to empower forest owners to restructure their forests for attaining climate fit forest stands. Healthy and resilient forests can also have a protective function against natural hazards, further emphasising the importance of supporting the landscape resilience in the EU.
- **Beyond the economic valorisation of timber, non-wood forest products like fruits, berries, nuts, mushrooms or game as well as agricultural, recreational and tourist activities applied in forests are experiencing a growing market demand.** These income options are becoming more important for rural livelihoods, while underlining the multifunctional role of forests and the relevance of agroforestry. It therefore calls for the forest sector and all its potential to be given a higher profile in European rural development policies.