

# ECE SP7 draft submission to HLPF 2022 “Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

## Introduction and overview on SP7s (Forests and Forest Industry) work on SDG15

Forest ecosystems in the UNECE region are not only a critical component of the world’s biodiversity; they also contain the world’s largest terrestrial carbon stock and are a source of sustainable materials. Their future resilience is vital for stabilizing the global climate. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the forestry industry has played a key role in providing raw materials for critical daily essentials, ranging from hygiene products, masks and other medical supplies to packaging materials for essential goods. Forests served as a safe space for socially distanced recreation and mental health, alleviating increased stress and anxiety caused by the global pandemic, especially in urban areas.

Even though the general economic slowdown during the pandemic temporarily reduced some man-made climate and nature pressures, it did not revert the overall negative trends facing forests globally. The most recent International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) Assessment Report confirmed that atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations were higher than at any time in at least 2 million years, and a 2020 IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Land concluded that the persistence of the forest carbon sink therefore remains uncertain. In addition, deforestation and forest degradation continue at alarming rates. This contributes significantly to the ongoing loss of biodiversity, and the increasing vulnerability to natural disturbances like wildfires, diseases and pests.

The IPCC reports also highlight that the pathways to net-zero and net-negative emissions must include the land sector. Sustainable forest management is essential for increasing forests’ resilience to a changing climate, safeguarding biodiversity, and ensuring that forests continue to provide us with the essential goods and services. In short, sustainable forest management is key for reaching Sustainable Development Goal 15 – Life on Land.

ECE’s SP7s (Forests and Forest Industry) supports achieving SDG 15 through data and evidence-based policies for sustainable forest management highlighting and exploring the many products and ecosystem services provided to society while assisting countries of the ECE region to monitor and manage forests. Specific tools such as the dedicated knowledge platform “[INForest](#)” helps countries by providing a comprehensive overview of the status and trends of forests and the forest sector in the ECE region.

## Key messages

- The COVID-19 pandemic showed that the multi-functional management of temperate and boreal forests in urban, peri-urban and rural areas of the ECE region were key to ensure the sustainability of forests and forest-based resources. Despite increased pressure caused by COVID-19 due to the high demand for raw material, wood as well as a strong increase in demand for recreational purposes; the continued diligent sustainable management of the forest resource during the pandemic ensured its availability and possibility for the delivery of

other ecosystem services, particularly the increased demand for green spaces in urban and peri-urban areas. This change of societal approach to the surrounding forests, will require the review and appropriate adjustment of the post-COVID-19 forest management.

- During the pandemic, some of the most pressing policy discussions on the role of forests in climate change mitigation were temporarily put on hold. The increased role of all forests in supporting climate change mitigation, health and well-being as well as providing a sustainable resource for generations to come will therefore require heightened attention in the post-pandemic years, both to reach SDG-15 and tackle the threats of climate change and biodiversity loss. This includes sustainable forest management policies and practices, the restoration of forest landscapes, more trees and green spaces in cities as well as attention to all types of forests and their economic and conservation use. Only a holistic, multi-functional ecosystem-based approach will ensure inclusive nature-based solutions leaving nobody behind.

Analytical documents prepared by ECE's SP7, agreed conclusions or other agreed documents

Ministerial Meeting on Forest Landscape Restoration and the ECCA30/Bonn Challenge in Eastern and South-East Europe

<https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-10/Ministerial%20Meeting%20Declaration.pdf>

Reports by the ECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry (including intergovernmental views and agreed decisions):

- **ECE/TIM/2020/2** (link: [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Report%20English\\_0.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Report%20English_0.pdf));
- **ECE/TIM/2021/2-FO:EFC/2021/2** – ([https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/ECE\\_TIM\\_2021\\_2-FO\\_EFC\\_2021\\_2\\_ENG.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/ECE_TIM_2021_2-FO_EFC_2021_2_ENG.pdf)).

The secretariat conducted and published the following studies which all contain information on forests and forest sector during COVID-19 pandemics and its contribution to reaching targets of SDG 15:

- **ECE/TIM/DP/89** “COVID-19 impacts on the forest sector in countries in the Western Balkans with a focus on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia” (link: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/357509>);
- **ECE/TIM/DP/88** “COVID-19 impacts on the forest sector in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” (link: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/363314>);
- **ECE/TIM/DP/87** “Forest Landscape Restoration in Eastern and South-East Europe” (<https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/358659>);
- **ECE/TIM/SP/52** “Forest Products Annual Market Review 2020-2021” (link: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/361907>);
- **ECE/TIM/SP/51** “Forest Sector Outlook 2020-2040” (link: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/362308>);
- **ECE/TIM/SP/50** “Forest Products Annual Market Review 2019-2020” (link: <https://unece.org/info/Forests/pub/348599>);
- **INForest** – data and knowledge platform on forests in the ECE region (link: <https://forest-data.unece.org/>).

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