

UNECE, FAO and FOREST EUROPE discuss how to make work in the forest sector more attractive and to generate new green jobs

New York, 4 May 2017: The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and FOREST EUROPE discussed at an event today during the twelfth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) how the forest workforce can adapt to the current trends to enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits.

Forests are increasingly attractive to people as a place of leisure and recreation, but less and less as a workplace. High levels of occupational injury and fatal accidents, low wages and low social status in some areas, and an ageing and largely male workforce make the sector unattractive to young generations. Around 30% of people employed in the forest sector in Europe are 49 years old or over. This percentage is increasing. Across Europe, women account for only 20% of the overall forest sector workforce (FOREST EUROPE, 2015). In 2014, the number of people employed by the world's public forestry sector was 14% lower than in 2010.

Furthermore, the nature of forest work is changing. In many cases, it is becoming less secure. With increased mechanization fewer workers are paid more, because the work is more skilled. Changing political and societal expectations of forests mean that public forest services, and forest management professionals, need to be prepared for work in a multi-disciplinary, multi-functional forest environment, and engage with a wide range of stakeholders.

The structures of forest work are also changing. Big companies have merged, downsized, relocated, restructured or disappeared, often with drastic consequences for workers and communities. Unions do not have the power nor offer the security that they once did. Much of the former work of corporations, particularly harvesting, has been out-sourced to a rapidly growing number of contractors who have different work cultures, and need new management and communication skills to do well.

“There are options and opportunities for the sector to diversify its activities and for the development of new skills required for forest jobs. Green jobs in the forest sector can be an important contribution to employment, and policy-makers need to address these issues as soon as possible” mentioned Ms. Ľudmila Marušáková, Head of Liaison Unit Bratislava (secretariat) of FOREST EUROPE.

The event at UNFF highlighted that the challenges in developing a sustainable workforce include making forest jobs more attractive –safer, better paid, with higher social prestige, and attract young workers. It also implies adapting training and education to bring them in line with the changing requirements – mechanized harvesting, increased responsibility and more communication with forest users. Greening the sector also implies looking at new types of jobs, which encompass research into ecosystem services and better management.

The representative of the UNECE/FAO/ILO Team of Specialists on Green Job in the Forest Sector, Mr. Diarmuid McAree, stressed that “Nothing is more empowering than having a job. The main objective of the UNECE/FAO/ILO Team of Specialists is to identify new green jobs in the forest sector and thus reduce unemployment problems to the benefit of future

generations. Neglecting foresters means neglecting the forest and its environmental, economic and social benefits to people”.

UNECE, FAO, ILO and FOREST EUROPE are actively cooperating to make sure that the issue of forest green jobs becomes high on the policy makers agenda in Europe. An international conference on forest green jobs to develop key recommendations will be held in Bratislava, from 27 to 28 June 2017 (see: <http://foresteurope.org/event/11934/>).