

Expert Group on Human Health and Well-being

1. Background

Following the outcomes of the Seventh Ministerial Conference (Madrid, Spain, 20-21 October 2015), the Expert Level Meeting held in Bratislava, Slovakia on 11-12 May 2016 approved FOREST EUROPE (FE) Work Programme (WP) for the period 2016-2020.

The FOREST EUROPE Expert Group (EG) on human health and well-being is established according to the FE WP Action 4.6 “Enhancing the social dimension of SFM in the context of the benefits of forests on human health and well-being” and its two activities: 4.6.1. „Review of knowledge and expertise on social aspects of SFM in the context of human well-being” and 4.6.2 “Promotion of social aspects of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in the context of human well-being”.

At the Madrid Conference, the ministers responsible for forests in the *Resolution 1* acknowledged that:

- *Forests are a source of employment with great potential to generate jobs and income opportunities also through new forest products and services as well as to contribute to rural development, **human well-being** and social equity, enabling also the long term economic viability and competitiveness of forestry and forest-based industries by serving as sound basis for bioeconomy.*

The Oslo Ministerial Decision "European Forests 2020" defined the following vision for forests in Europe:

- *"To shape future where all European forests are vital, productive and multifunctional. Where forests contribute effectively to sustainable development, through ensuring **human well-being**, healthy environment and economic development in Europe and across the globe."*

Moreover, the Ministers responsible for forests in Europe at the Oslo Ministerial Conference in 2011 decided on European targets to be achieved by 2020 in support of the shared vision:

- *Target 8: "All European countries have policies and measures which ensure a significant increase in **socio-economic and cultural benefits**, especially for **human health**, livelihoods, rural development and employment from forests"*

At the Vienna Ministerial Conference in 2003 the ministers responsible for forests adopted the Vienna Resolution 3 "Preserving and Enhancing the Social and Cultural Dimensions of Sustainable Forest Management in Europe." The signatories to Vienna Resolution 3 committed themselves, inter alia, to:

- *Maintain and further develop both the material (e.g. wood in architecture, medicinal plants) and the non-material (e.g. recreation, well-being, health) **social and cultural aspects** and benefits of sustainable forest management.*
- *Encourage the identification, expression and communication of the **social and cultural dimensions** of sustainable forest management inter alia by including them in education and rural development programmes.*

In the above-mentioned Resolutions and Decisions, the ministers stated that they were aware that in recent decades the perception of the benefits of European forests has broadened towards social benefits, which are frequently mentioned as an emerging issue for the future. Forests provide enormous possibilities to improve human health conditions. There is clear scientific evidence that forests as place for recreation and eco-tourism have positive effects on physical and mental health. Given these positive impacts and benefits of forests on human health and well-being, forests are a unique place for leisure activities, restoration, recovery from stress and further social and therapeutic interventions.

Forests including urban and peri-urban forests and other green spaces can play important roles in ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being through disease prevention, therapy and recovery. The presence of, and access to, green spaces can promote active lifestyle and regular exercise, thereby reducing the risks posed by obesity, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, respiratory disorders and some types of cancer.

The contribution of forests to human well-being is being increasingly recognized by health experts and institutions.

Moreover, forests as a learning environment encourage application of holistic approach, help to develop global and long-term thinking and acting, improve social behavior, support motivation, creativity, respect and responsibility for nature. Forest visitors can learn about benefits of the use of wood as a renewable material and develop sense of responsibility and interaction for the role of forests and forestry ahead the climate change mitigation.

Strengthened social dimension of SFM can lead to new opportunities for the forest sector and unlock the potential for new green jobs development, diversification and an additional income. Moreover, these new types of non-wood forest products and ecosystem services as well as new form of employment in the forest sector will strengthen the contribution of the sector to well-being of society, especially to meet its expectations and demands. This is becoming more and more important due to demographic change and changes in lifestyle of society in Europe, where the population is aging and people tend to spend more time relaxing in order to have healthier life. The fact remains that, in many cases, forest managers and forest owners are not aware of the benefits of recreation, eco-tourism, forest related education, Forest Pedagogy and only see them as a cost and distraction from “more important” forest management goals, such as timber production.

Building on former initiatives, ongoing work and experience in signatory countries and organizations, FOREST EUROPE seeks ways to strengthen the social aspects of sustainable forest management. Highlighting the positive impacts and benefits of forests on human health and well-being, FOREST EUROPE tackles this highly topical issue, which is also in line with global agenda, mainly/namely the **UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development** as well as the EU Forest Action Plan and the EU Forest Strategy.

2. Detailed activities of the Expert Group

Detailed activities of the EG are based on the Action 4.6 of the approved FE Work Programme 2016-2020:

Activity	Time frame
<p>4.6.1. <i>Review (analysis) of international research data on social aspects of SFM with special attention to impacts and benefits of forest environment and forest products on human health and well-being, particularly physiological and psychological effects, immune functions, social health and personal development.</i></p>	2017-2018
<p>4.6.2. <i>Workshop shall be convened to enable sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice examples relating to social aspects of SFM with special attention to human well-being, health, education and personal development highlighting the health benefits of forests. This workshop should be organized in close cooperation with relevant actors from health sector and private sector (e.g. eco-tourism, insurance companies and other).</i></p> <p><i>The workshop outcomes in the form of <u>policy recommendations</u> on promotion of entrepreneurship based on ecotourism, "forest bathing trips," forest related education, outdoor learning programmes and businesses based on processing of non-wood goods with positive effect on quality of life and/or prevention of diseases, inter alia, depression, obesity or "nature deficit disorder" will be published. The aim is to highlight the fact that the promotion of the social pillar of SFM can generate new opportunities for both forest owners and managers.</i></p>	2019

3. Scope and objectives

Expert Group is an ad hoc mechanism with the purpose of advancing implementation of the Work Programme on specific subjects of technical and scientific nature. The EG on human health and well-being is an informal body created to share expertise, exchange experience and formulate policy oriented recommendations on the thematic issues and challenges related to social benefits of SFM. The EG provides policy and expert advice to the ELM and guidance to the Liaison Unit Bratislava (LUB) in their work related to the activities 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 of the FE WP. More specifically, the EG will carry out the following tasks:

Main tasks:

- **Review of research resources/scientific evidence** published in the recent twenty years in pan-European region (in 46 signatory countries), such as research papers, project outcomes, best practices, surveys pertinent to social aspects of SFM in the context of human health and well-being; to gather scientific knowledge
- Guide and prepare an **international workshop** on social benefits of forests contributing to human health and well-being; The EG will play the role of a steering committee responsible for the workshop preparation.
- Identify the **recommendations for the integration of social aspects into SFM (e.g. how to benefit from positive effects of forests on human health within the forest sector/how to maximise potential of forests and forests sector to contribute to human well-being)**
- Prepare a **publication/study** containing facts, figures, best practices and policy recommendations (based on/follow up of the review)

Secondary/Complementary tasks:

- **Liase and identify possible cooperation with representative and experts from other sectors**, especially with health and social sector, tourism, education, insurance companies, other relevant businesses with the aim to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation and possibly mainstream forestry and forestry activities to broader policy agenda and policies in other sectors;
- **Provide inputs into awareness raising campaign focused on the social aspects of SFM** in the context of human well-being; increasing demand for forest recreation and education;
- Guide and assist LUB with presentation of the main EG outputs at key international events on the topic in forestry and beyond the sector.
- Prepare a **report to be presented at Expert Level Meeting**; (and potentially at the 8th FOREST EUROPE Ministerial Conference on Protection of Forests in Europe in 2020);

Thematic scope:

The EG shall focus its work on the following areas:

- Impacts and effects of forests on human health and well-being and integration of these aspects into mainstream SFM
- Contribution to human health and well-being by forest ecosystem services, forest recreation, forest eco-tourism, Forest Pedagogics, forest-related education, education to sustainable development
- New employment opportunities related to forest therapy and healing and forest bathing;
- Policies and strategies, financial and administrative mechanism, technical and operational aspects (infrastructure and facilities, training and education, etc.) to maximize the potential for green spaces to deliver positive environmental and health benefits.

4. Expected outcomes

- 4.1.** Research **review** of the existing resources/scientific evidence published in the recent twenty years in Europe, such as research papers, project outcomes, best practices, surveys pertinent to social aspects of SFM in the context of human health and well-being and will serve as a background information for the 1st meeting of the EG; review will map the situation in FOREST EUROPE signatory countries and to provide overview of existing best practices examples and ongoing initiatives
- 4.2.** Based on the research review, the **publication/study** for policy makers containing the best practices and policy recommendations will be elaborated
- 4.3.** An international **workshop** on social benefits of forests with specific objectives:
 - Enable sharing of knowledge, expertise, experience, best practice examples and challenges relating to social aspects of SFM with special attention to human well-being, health, education and personal development highlighting the benefits, effects and impacts of forests;

- Identify and explore options for applying “forest welfare” strategies including the development of policy recommendations - see bullet point c);
- Promote interplay and partnerships between research, policy and forest management about the integration of social aspects of forests for well-being into SFM;
- Enhance cross-sectoral cooperation, especially with health and social sector, tourism, education, insurance companies and other businesses, and put efforts to mainstream forestry and forestry activities to policies of these sectors;
- To promote the development of green jobs, diversification of forestry activities in the forest sector based on ecotourism, "forest bathing trips," forest related education, wildlife watching, outdoor learning programmes and businesses based on processing of non-wood goods with positive effect on quality of life and/or prevention of diseases, inter alia, depression, obesity or “nature deficit disorder”. The aim is to highlight the fact that the promotion of the social pillar of SFM can generate new opportunities for forest owners and managers.

4.4. Policy **recommendations** for strengthening the integration of social aspects, such as forest recreation, eco-tourism, forest-related education and Forest Pedagogics, forest healing and therapy **into SFM** in the region. The recommendations will serve as a background for designing forest policies and strategies promoting impacts and benefits of forests on human health and well-being leading to increasing diversification of the sector and new jobs based on forest related services, use of wood and non-wood forest products. The recommendations will touch upon political, strategic, technical and operational support, infrastructure, facilities, training of professional staff providing services related to forest education and healing programmes, etc. The recommendations will be made available for voluntary use by national authorities as well as other relevant bodies and stakeholders including private businesses and entrepreneurs.

4.5. A report to be presented at Expert Level Meeting.

5. Time schedule

Phase I (2017 – 5/2018)

- Raising awareness/increasing sensibility of the topic – raising the subject at pan-European level
- Liaising with relevant experts, researchers and actors and creation of expert group
- Enhancement of cooperation with other actors, health and social sector, tourism, education, etc. – strengthening the cross-sector cooperation
- Elaboration of the review (analysis), gathering the existing research data, existing policies (international and national level) and current development of the topic
- Kick-off meeting - January 2018

Phase II (6/2018 – 3/2019)

- Preparation of the workshop with the aim to enable sharing of knowledge, experience and best practice examples relating to social aspects of SFM with a special attention to human well-being, health, education and personal development highlighting the health benefits of forests.

Phase III (3/2019 - 2020)

- Development of the policy recommendations by the EG
- Completing the publication (analysis + recommendations for policy making)
- Searching for other political implications (contribution to SDGs, other policies, etc.)

6. Mode of work

Methods of the EG work comprise face-to-face meetings (including thematic sub-groups meetings when the EG finds them appropriate) combined with continuing work between the meetings e.g. analyzing documents, preparing drafts of documents, etc. If there is a need to discuss particular issues between the face-to-face meetings, an online meeting or consultation can be arranged. In case of any specific topics not covered by the EG, invited experts might be engaged. The EG might consider contribution of conducting a questionnaire survey if there is a necessity to collect data or information which cannot be brought by the EG. The EG is welcomed to collaborate with other FOREST EUROPE expert groups to use synergies where appropriate, namely with expert groups on green jobs, ecosystem services, adaptation to climate change and/or SFM indicators. Moreover, other appropriate forms of work can be considered by the EG, considering their effectiveness, efficiency and transparency.

Liaison Unit Bratislava will provide technical, administrative and logistics support to the EG as well as will serve as contact point for communication between the EG members.

7. Composition of the EG

The EG is composed of members - experts nominated by the signatory countries and observer organizations. The EG will be open ended. Signatories and observers are invited to nominate experts for the EG according to interest and availability to contribute to the Action. In case of need, other relevant independent experts, especially from health, social care, tourism, education and private sector or other relevant organizations can be invited to provide inputs on specific subjects. The EG is expected to cooperate intensively with other international organizations and national research bodies.