

FOREST EUROPE Structures, Procedures and Work Modalities

FOREST EUROPE is Europe's voluntary high level political process that develops common strategies for its 47 signatories (46 European countries and the European Union) on sustainable management of forests (including the protection of forests) in the European region. It takes decisions on common aspects of the highest political relevance regarding forests, forestry and forest related issues in order to maximise the contribution of European forests to the ecological, social and economic well-being of the region.

FOREST EUROPE's broader vision is to contribute to the sustainable development of society at large, based on the three pillars of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) as it continues with the realisation of the shared vision for forests in Europe and the related Goals and 2020 Targets for European Forests, adopted at the Ministerial Conference in Oslo, in 2011.

FOREST EUROPE's mission is to advance the realization of the shared vision, Goals and the 2020 Targets: "FOREST EUROPE enhances the cooperation on forest policies in Europe under the leadership of ministers, and secures and promotes SFM with the aim of maintaining the multiple functions of forests crucial to society."

Following the Oslo Ministerial Decision: European Forests 2020, FOREST EUROPE shall undertake the following tasks:

- a. Develop and update policies and tools for sustainable forest management, including by facilitating open and flexible policy dialogue, active participation by relevant stakeholders and cross-sectoral cooperation and coordination with other actors;
- b. Monitor, assess and facilitate implementation of commitments on forests and sustainable forest management in all European countries and in the region as a whole;
- c. Promote education, research and the use of scientific knowledge and facilitate sharing of experiences across countries, sectors and stakeholders on all aspects of sustainable forest management and other forest related issues;
- d. Raise awareness and understanding of contributions by FOREST EUROPE to sustainable forest management in relevant fora including at international level and among the public, including through implementation of the communications strategy.

In line with the established practice, tasks of the FOREST EUROPE process aimed at the implementation of the ministerial commitments are carried out within the following formal structures of the process.

1. Negotiation and decision-making structures:

- Ministerial Conference (MC)
- Expert Level Meeting (ELM)

2. Collaborative tools for strategic debate:

- Roundtable Meeting (RTM)
- Working group (WG)
- Advisory group (AG)

3. Collaborative tools for technical debate:

- Expert groups (EG)
- Workshops (W)

4. Supportive coordinating structures:

- General Coordinating Committee (GCC)
- Liaison Unit (LU)

1. Negotiation and decision-making structures:

Ministerial Conference (MC)

MC represents the high-level forum for political dialogue on forests and forestry in Europe. It is the decision-making body of the process where ministers responsible for forestry take decisions on issues of the highest political and social relevance regarding forests and forestry. The commitments are made in the form of a declaration, resolution or decision, and serve as a basis for the decision-making processes in signatory countries.

Delegations of signatories and observers attend the MC. The delegations of signatory countries and observer countries are usually led by the ministers responsible for forestry, or alternatively by senior policy makers (state secretaries, advisors, directors general). Members of the country delegations are formally nominated by the respective ministries. Delegations of observer organizations consist of their representatives nominated by the heads of these organizations.

Since the inception of the FOREST EUROPE process in 1990, seven MCs have taken place at an interval of 3 to 5 years. Time and venue of the MC is determined by the country that co-chairs the process and hosts the MC and Liaison Unit.

Agenda of the MC is also defined by the co-chairing country taking into account recommendations of GCC and ELM. Topics for the ministerial commitments are defined through RTM discussions followed by formal approval by ELM (see below). All documents tabled at the MC especially those to be signed by the Ministers are developed by drafting meetings and formally approved by ELM.

MC is co-chaired by the Ministers representing the two countries co-chairing the process.

MC is a formal event, in which Heads of delegations deliver statements on the topics addressed in the ministerial documents. Press conference(s) and a high-level GCC meeting are usually held at the occasion of the MC.

Expert Level Meeting (ELM)

ELM represents the decision making body during periods between MCs. At these meetings, the delegates of FOREST EUROPE signatories have the mandate to take decisions regarding implementation of the commitments, adopt and make amendments in Work Programme, review progress made, address arising issues and advice on steps to be taken, define topics and prepare documents for upcoming MC, and establish Working Groups or other ad hoc structures with terms of reference. ELM is organized in the form of a plenary session having the function of a "general assembly", attended by representatives of signatories and observers.

ELM meets once or twice a year depending on needs and usually takes place in the country that co-chairs the process and convenes the next MC. Decision on frequency, dates and agenda of ELM is taken by the GCC.

ELM is open to representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations. According to established practice, signatory countries through the ministries responsible for forestry and the heads of observer organizations, respectively, nominate delegates (so-called focal points) to participate in the meetings.

ELM is chaired by the heads of delegation from the two countries that currently co-chair FOREST EUROPE. Draft agenda and documentation for ELM are usually prepared by the Liaison Unit in consultation with the GCC. All documentation is distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting.

During ELM, proposals and amendments of discussed documents are made by the signatories and observers at the request of the co-chairs. The objective of a proposal is to facilitate discussions on respective decision related to documents submitted to ELM, such as work programme, guidelines, reports of RTM, EG, AG, WG, etc.

Decisions during meetings are taken by consensus among the signatories. Normally, if no signatory makes an objection, the co-chair draws a decision. In some cases and wherever necessary, a decision is arrived through written procedure after the meeting.

Minutes of the meetings are taken by the LU and principal decisions are endorsed in plenary at the end of each meeting. Minutes are then finalized by the LU, approved by the GCC and distributed in due time (ideally within two - three weeks) after the meeting.

2. Collaborative tools for strategic debate

Roundtable Meeting (RTM)

Roundtable meeting is a platform for strategic discussion, exchange of information and views on emerging issues. RTM also provides essential guidance for the implementation of FOREST EUROPE commitments and on strategic issues.

RTMs are open to representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations. According to established practice, signatory countries through the ministries responsible for forestry and the heads of observer organizations, respectively, nominate delegates (so-called focal points) to participate in the meetings.

RTM is conducted as an informal discussion forum called ad-hoc on themes of high or emerging political relevance. Decision on frequency, dates, and venue of RTM is taken by the ELM.

The setting applied is usually a moderated discussion and an interactive format of the meeting.

Draft agenda and documentation is usually prepared by the Liaison in consultation with the GCC. All documentation is distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers no later than 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting prior to the meeting.

Minutes of the meetings are taken by the LU, approved by the GCC and distributed after the meeting.

Minutes of the meetings are taken by the LU and principal decisions are endorsed in plenary at end of each meeting. Minutes are then finalized by the LU, approved by the GCC and distributed in due time (ideally within two - three weeks) after the meeting.

Working group (WG)

Working Groups represent ad hoc mechanisms for advancing work on specific task/subjects of political nature and furthering implementation of specific FOREST EUROPE commitments. WG is composed of representatives of FOREST EUROPE signatories, observer countries and observer organizations, with membership based on interest and availability to contribute.

Working Group is constituted by adoption of its Terms of Reference and Roadmap, and appointment of Co-Chair(s).

LU provides technical, administrative and logistics support. Draft agenda and documentation is usually prepared by the Liaison in consultation with the GCC. All documentation is distributed to FOREST EUROPE signatories and observers no later than 4-6 weeks prior to the meeting prior to the meeting.

Minutes of the meetings are taken by the LU, approved by the GCC and distributed after the meeting.

Minutes of the meetings are taken by the LU and principal decisions are endorsed in plenary at end of each meeting. Minutes are then finalized by the LU, approved by the GCC and distributed in due time (ideally within two - three weeks) after the meeting.

The results/outcomes of WG are presented for consideration to the subsequent ELM.

Advisory Group (AG)

Advisory Groups represent ad hoc mechanisms for advancing work on specific subjects of scientific and technical nature. The AG is an informal body invited to formulate its evidence based opinions on all aspects related to a specific task of the Work Programme, e.g. SoEF.

The AG is composed of individuals/experts nominated by countries and relevant international organizations and invited experts. FE LU in cooperation with FE General Coordinating Committee (GCC) will propose the organisations and experts to be invited to the AG.

Any member country of FOREST EUROPE process, if it so desires, can send its representative to work as an observer to the AG.

The AG will normally meet once a year; however, it can be called, as and when required, including thematic sub-groups meetings.

The AG will have a Secretary provided by FE LU to manage, document and support its business; the secretary of the AG will be responsible for drafting, the final version of the minutes for each of its meetings and manage the website for the AG.

The AG will have a Chairperson and a Vice-chairperson that serves until the report is prepared and delivered. Chairperson and Vice-chairperson will be elected at the first AG meeting and will be selected from the list of nominations provided in advance of the first AG meeting.

3. Collaborative tools for technical debate:

Expert Groups

Expert Groups represent ad hoc mechanisms for advancing work on specific subjects of scientific and technical nature. Their main role is to contribute to implementation of the FE Work Programme. The EG provides policy and expert advice to the ELM and guidance to the Liaison Unit (LU) in their work related to the activities and actions of WP.

EG are attended by representatives nominated by the countries and observers, and wherever justified also by invited experts on specific topics, depending on the subject and nature of each event. 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. analysing 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 is welcomed to collaborate with other FOREST EUROPE expert groups to use synergies where appropriate.

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.

The results of these structures are presented for consideration to the subsequent ELM.

Workshops

Workshops represent ad hoc mechanisms for advancing work on specific subjects of scientific and technical nature. Their outcomes are presented for consideration at subsequent ELM. Workshops are attended by representatives nominated by countries and observer organizations, and also by invited experts on specific topics.

4. Supportive coordinating structures

General Coordinating Committee (GCC)

GCC is responsible for overall coordination of the FOREST EUROPE work and has an oversight function towards the Liaison Unit regarding the implementation of the ministerial commitments and addressing strategic developments.

It consists of five countries, namely the co-chair country that convenes the next MC and the co-chair country that hosted the previous MC. In the middle of the Work Programme implementation period, the country that will convene the MC after the next MC takes over the role of the second co-chair country. Two more countries, which will succeed in the line of chairing FOREST EUROPE are also members of the GCC.

Hence the membership in the GCC is based on rotation principle. At each MC a new country is appointed as the incoming GCC member instead of the country that organized the previous MC. Participation in the GCC depends on country willingness and ability to play an active role including provision of financial support to the process. The GCC countries provide core funding of FOREST EUROPE.

GCC meetings are held ad hoc based on actual needs and usually take place in one of the GCC countries (rotating), or back to back to other events wherever possible and feasible. Minutes are taken by the Liaison Unit staff and are subject of approval by the GCC. Summary of the minutes approved by the GCC are published on the FOREST EUROPE website.

The main aims and responsibilities of the GCC are to:

- Provide strategic guidance and advice on implementation of the Work Programme, manage and guide the work of Liaison Unit in its implementation;
- Provide professional guidance and recommendations for strategic partnerships, and in the selection of external experts conducting specific tasks resulting from the Work Programme to ensure the transfer of the latest science and research outcomes to the FOREST EUROPE strategic documents;
- Review and approve officially released documents prepared by the Liaison Unit;
- Review and approve annual budget for the Liaison Unit;
- Approve annual financial report;

Liaison Unit (LU)

LU serves as the rotating secretariat of the FOREST EUROPE process. Its location, hosting arrangement and staff are determined by the country that co-chairs the process and convenes the next MC. During the implementation of all activities, LU proceeds in accordance with the political and operational documents adopted by the formal structures of the FOREST EUROPE process i.e. Ministerial Conferences, Expert Level Meetings and in line with the guidelines of the General Coordinating Committee.

LU coordinates implementation of all activities of the Work Programme. Key tasks of LU includes:

- Elaboration of the draft of the work programme under the guidance of GCC;
- LU acts as a liaison point for the overall communication between FOREST EUROPE stakeholders (i.e. representatives of governments of signatory countries, international institutions and processes, international interest groups of forest managers, wood-processing organizations, universities, and research institutions) to promote SFM concept and implement the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme;
- Organization and support of FOREST EUROPE meetings;
- Preparation of reports, background documents and other documentation for the meetings;
- Preparation of terms-of-references for external experts conducting analysis, studies, expertises;
- Day-to-day coordination of the implementation of all actions and activities of the Work Programme;
- Preparation and implementation of communications strategy;
- Representation of the process, in consultation with the GCC, in regional and international forest related events and organizations;
- Liaison with relevant international and regional organizations and processes.

Financial mechanism

Currently, the core budget of FOREST EUROPE is covered by pooled financial contributions of the five member countries of the GCC. The amount of individual contributions differs depending on countries' position in the GCC. The co-chairing country that convenes the next MC provides 60% of the budget. The other co-chairing country provides 16% of the budget and the other three GCC countries contribute 8% each.

The core budget covers mainly the cost of LU maintenance, organisation of FOREST EUROPE events and partially implementation of the activities and actions of the Work Programme. Moreover, the budget is also used to support the participation of delegates nominated by signatory countries with economies in transition (so called eligible countries)¹ at the FOREST EUROPE meetings.

Voluntary and in-kind contributions are possible and strongly encouraged, particularly from those signatories and observers leading activities of the Work Programme. Also other signatories of the FOREST EUROPE process can provide voluntary financial contributions to the core budget or for special projects.

MC is financed by the two co-chairing countries of the process (contributing by equal shares).

Languages

MC is usually conducted in English with simultaneous interpretation into French, Russian and official languages of the two countries that co-chair the process. Ministerial documents are signed in English, however, official version of commitments in French and Russian are available (published on the website).

ELM and RTM are generally held in English and interpreted into French and Russian, while other FOREST EUROPE meetings are held in English.

¹ Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine