

# Introduction

The first of the State of Europe's Forests reports was issued by the Ministerial Conferences on the Protection of Forests in Europe (FOREST EUROPE) in 2003, under the chairmanship of Austria. Similarly, this fifth report of the series is published under the chairmanship of the Slovak Republic in the FOREST EUROPE process for the Eighth Ministerial Conference.

The State of Europe's Forests 2020 report (SoEF 2020) presents recent official figures and information on European forests, their management, policies, institutional and legal frameworks in the FOREST EUROPE signatory countries.

The data collection and preparation of this report was coordinated by the FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bratislava with support from many partners, authors and other contributors acknowledged in a dedicated section.

The data presented has been provided by individual countries through the joint FOREST EUROPE/UNECE/FAO Questionnaires and by international data providers, namely European Forest Genetic

Resources Programme (EUFORGEN), the Statistical Office of the European Union (EUROSTAT), the International Co-operative Programme on Assessment and Monitoring of Air Pollution Effects on Forests (ICP-Forests), the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Pan-European Common Bird Monitoring Scheme (PECBMS) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

Within the data collection process, the countries were asked to provide data for the whole period from 1990, comparable to the latest data supplied. Depending on the specific indicator and countries' conditions, the data availability and the completeness of reporting vary. Therefore, for most of the regional analyses, it is indicated for which proportion of the total regional forest area current data apply. When analysing trends, only those countries that have provided a complete time series are considered. Due to methodological changes in data collection and varying completeness of data submission, the information and analyses presented here might not be directly comparable with the results of previous reports.



**Figure A: Grouping of the European countries into regions presented in SoEF reports**

For this and previous SoEF reports, the FOREST EUROPE signatory countries, forming the pan-European region, were grouped into 6 groups to allow for comparison of possible regional specifics (Figure A). The Russian Federation alone has represented a separate region for which updated information was not delivered, thus it could not be included in SoEF 2020, except Annex tables containing information provided in earlier reporting campaigns, and the remaining 5 regions are summed up to the European total.

The data for the report was collected in the period 2018-2019. At that time, data for the year 2015 were already available and, for some indicators, correspondents could project data for 2020. However, e.g. the most recent developments in forests of some European countries, caused by storms, drought, or insect outbreaks, which lead to alarming mortality of trees and significant amounts of salvage timber, could not be systematically covered and included in the report. A clear note of the critical situation with bark beetle infestation in spruce forests was delivered e.g. by the Czech Republic.

Considering these new developments, and the generally high growing stock levels, the increase in biomass stocks may become reduced in the nearest future in Europe. In the longer run, increased use of harvested wood products, specifically of those with a long lifespan, can, therefore, maintain or temporarily increase carbon sink capacity linked to European forests.

The report is structured around the pan-European criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management (SFM), which are the basic tool to monitor, assess and report progress towards SFM. The first pan-European set of criteria and indicators for SFM was adopted at the Ministerial Conference held in Lisbon 1998 and then revised in 2003 and 2015. The current report utilised the most recent update of the pan-European set of criteria and indicators for SFM endorsed by the ministers at the

7<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference in Madrid 2015 as Annex 1 to the Madrid Ministerial Declaration. This update of the pan-European indicators for SFM respected the framework of the existing six criteria and created a linkage between the qualitative and the quantitative indicators. Now, the structure of the updated set is formed by an overarching policy framework of the set, named "Forest policy and governance", and by the set of indicators under the six pan-European criteria for SFM, aligning the specific policies and instruments under each criterion and the related quantitative indicators.

The key findings are presented in the summary for policy-makers at the beginning of the report. The main report is divided into two main parts. The first part reflects the current state and changes over time for indicators on the policy framework and on the indicators of the six criteria for SFM, i.e. forest resources and their contribution to global carbon cycles; forest ecosystem health and vitality; productive functions of forests; biological diversity in forest ecosystems; protective functions in forest management; and other socio-economic functions and condition. The second part of the report presents country-wise main trends in forest management, formulated in 2019 as a result of the dialogue with national correspondents and may contain further updates to the information provided in the first part. Therefore a few of the data presented in this second part might not be directly comparable with the first part. The report is complemented by the Annex tables.

The overall aim of this report is to provide policy and decision-makers and stakeholders with updated information on the status and trends in forests and sustainable forest management in Europe. As it presents the most recent harmonised and objective data related to the sustainability of forest management in Europe, it can also provide a solid basis for future political commitments on forests and forest-related issues.