Green jobs in the forest sector

“Now the choice we face is not between saving our environment and saving our economy. The choice we face is between prosperity and decline ... We can allow climate change to wreak unnatural havoc across the landscape, or we can create jobs working to prevent its worst effects.”

President Obama, United States of America (22/4/2009)

Forests are a source of income, employment and green jobs

“Green jobs opportunities result from employment in production of green products and services and/or employment in environmentally friendly processes providing they are decent jobs. Generally, all jobs associated with sustainable forest management have a potential to be green”

According to the International Labour Organization, at least half of the global workforce - the equivalent of 1.5 billion people - is affected by the transition to a greener economy and the transformation to a greener and low-carbon economy could generate up to 60 million additional jobs across economic sectors. In the EU, 14.6 million direct and indirect jobs exist in the protection of biodiversity and rehabilitation of natural resources and forests.

In most European countries, the number of people employed in the forest sector has decreased. There is a huge diversity of qualifications, with pronounced differences between regions. However, the forest sector in Europe provided jobs and income for around 3 million people, plus an unaccounted number of people in informal employment, which is not reflected in the reported data. The forest sector still plays an enormous role in the livelihood of rural areas.

Over the last 25 years, the number of highly qualified employees has increased in Europe, which is caused by general trends but also by increasing mechanization. On the other hand, there is a lot of jobs occupied by low qualified workforce, often migrant workers in some countries.

Despite the fact that reported fatal and non-fatal occupational accidents decreased considerably in Europe during the last 25 years, forestry work remains a dangerous occupation. Occupational accidents are highest in countries that are characterized by difficult topography.

Source of data: State of Europe’s Forests 2005

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Key messages from FOREST EUROPE 7th Ministerial Conference:

- A qualified and safe workforce is one of the pillars of a more competitive forest sector.
- The transition to a green economy in the forest sector cannot be understood separately from its social dimension: green jobs are decent jobs.
- Social inclusion and gender equality should be promoted along the whole forest value chain.
- Education and training systems should be adapted to changing conditions, technologies and the new skills required in the forest sector.

Did you know?

- Across Europe, women only account for 20% of the overall workforce in the forest sector. The majority of workers in wood manufacturing are male while, in contrast, in some countries females make up around half of the workforce in the paper industry.
- Around 30% of all people employed in forestry in Europe are 49 years old or over. The forestry workforce is ageing, and despite the vast differences between countries, the generally high age level of the workforce poses a real threat for the future of forestry.

Recruitment of new, younger workers into the sector is a challenge to be addressed. Transition to a green economy and a need for more qualified employees with specific skills in innovative industries will create an opportunity to attract young people to the sector.

Diversification of the forest sector in forest based bio-economy and circular economy offers great opportunities not only to develop the forest sector itself, but will also develop new green jobs and promote new professions. Processing of various non-wood goods and using positive impacts of forests on human health, well-being and as a setting for recreation, sport and leisure time have a great potential to generate new green jobs and entrepreneurship based on ecotourism, ecotherapy, forest related education and healing therapy programmes. Besides energy production, also forest protection, arbo-ristic tree care, urban and mountain forestry could also increase demand for new work professions.

FOREST EUROPE activities in the field of green jobs

FOREST EUROPE continues in its recent efforts to promote green jobs in the forest sector and social aspects of sustainable forest management in Europe.

FOREST EUROPE Work Programme for the period 2016-2020 contains actions focused on enhancement of education and training systems, defining requirements for green jobs in the forest sector, including new skills development, which will be necessary in innovative products and services. This work should result in preparation of guidelines on the promotion of green jobs in the forest sector in the pan-European region.

International Labour Organization

Green jobs are central to sustainable development and respond to the global challenges of environmental protection, economic development and social inclusion. By engaging governments, workers and employers as active agents of change, the ILO promotes the greening of enterprises, workplace practices and the labour market as a whole. These efforts create decent employment opportunities, enhance resource efficiency and build low-carbon, sustainable societies.