

# Ex post-evaluation of the EU Forest Action Plan (2007-2011)



**European Commission**  
Agriculture and  
Rural Development

Service contract no: 30-CE-0453512/00-22 / DG Agriculture and Rural Development



# Why is forestry important?

**F**orests serve many purposes and functions. They make an important contribution to employment, economic growth and prosperity in the EU, providing jobs and a livelihood for millions of workers and forest owners. Forests are an important source of raw materials for industry, supplying wood, pulp, cork and fibres to many sectors, as well as biomass for energy.

Non-wood products (for example mushrooms and game) and services (including protection against natural hazards, recreation, tourism and health, cultural and spiritual values) are often understood as public goods provided by forests. There is rising awareness of the fact that these aspects of forests also require attention, and can provide jobs and income especially in rural areas. Forests also have vital environmental functions, hosting an important share of biodiversity and preserving resources like water and soil. They are an important factor in mitigating climate change, and combating erosion and desertification.

Balancing all these functions in a sustainable manner is challenging, but sustainable forest management can address the economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of forests in Europe.

## What is the EU Forest Action Plan?

The EU Forestry Strategy (Council Resolution in 1998) states that the main responsibility for forestry policy lies with Member States. International commitments, priorities and recommendations are implemented through national and sub-national forest programmes or appropriate instruments developed by the Member States. Although there is no specific EU forest policy, the EU can contribute to the implementation of sustainable forest management and the multifunctional role of forests. In fact several EU policy fields affect forestry, such as agriculture and rural development, nature conservation, industry, climate action and energy.

The EU Forest Action Plan (EU FAP) is the main instrument for implementing the EU Forestry Strategy and coordinating forest-related issues between the Commission, Member States and international levels, as well as between sectors which affect forestry in the EU. No specific resources are earmarked for implementing the EU FAP in 2007-2011 – implementation is based on existing resources such as rural development programmes in the Member States, and other EU and national funding.

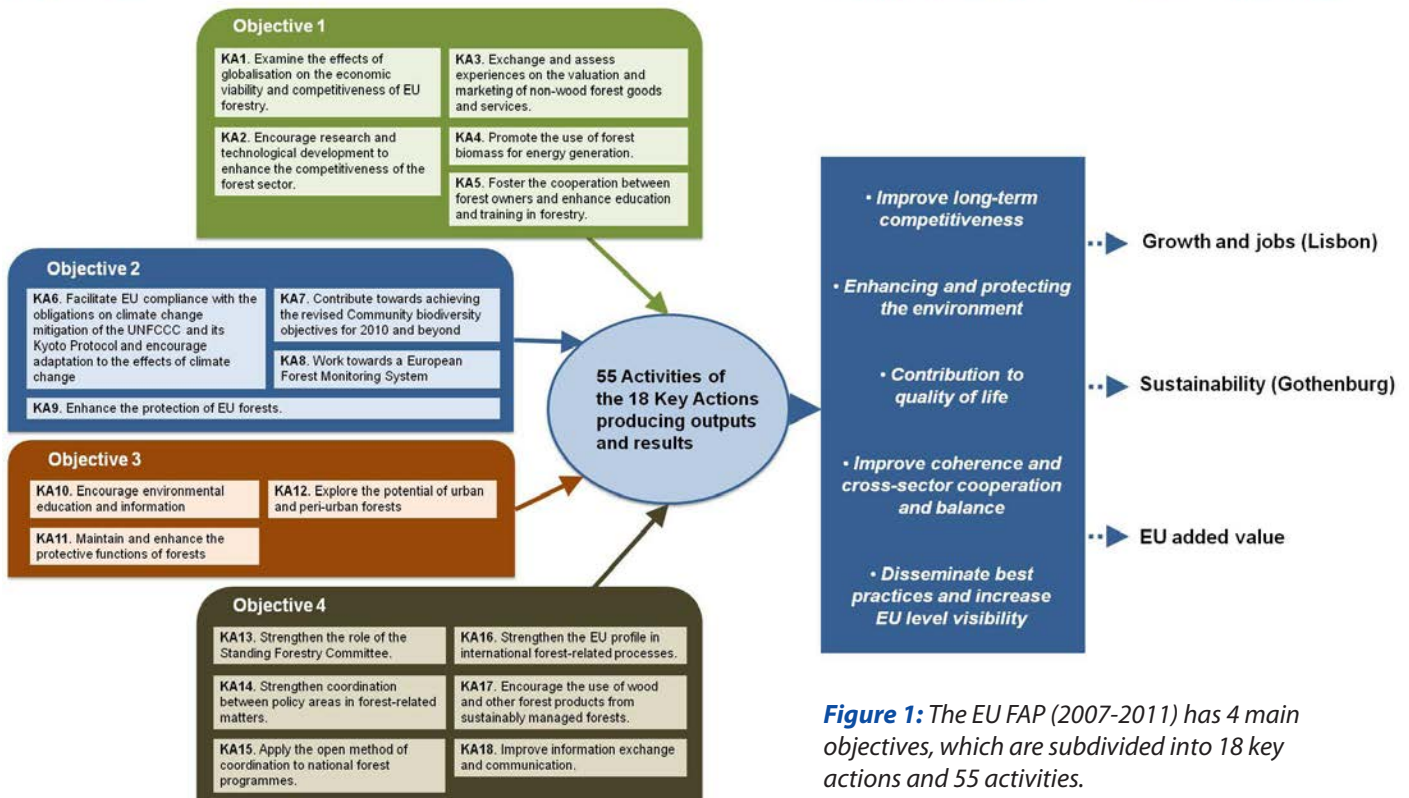
## THE 27 EU MEMBER STATES

- 178 million ha forest / wooded land (42% of land area)
- 350,000 enterprises in forestry and forest-based industries, employing almost 2.6 million people

## Ex-post evaluation of the EU Forest Action Plan

The European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development commissioned an ex-post evaluation of the EU FAP in 2011. Work was carried out from November 2011-April 2012 by an external evaluation team from the European Forest Institute (EFI / coordinator), Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) and Forest Sciences Centre of Catalonia (CTFC). The work builds on the analysis started in the mid-term evaluation of the EU FAP (2009). Analyses are based on data and information collected by means of questionnaire surveys and personal interviews conducted with representatives from the EU Member States, the European Commission and stakeholders, as well as extensive document reviews. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness and efficiency of the Action Plan implementation and its relevance and appropriateness, using five evaluation questions.





**Figure 1:** The EU FAP (2007-2011) has 4 main objectives, which are subdivided into 18 key actions and 55 activities.

### QUESTION 1: To what extent have the activities in the framework of the EU FAP been effective and efficient?

#### • Improving long-term competitiveness

The EU FAP contributed to the long-term competitiveness of forestry by using rural development funds in Member States for activities, e.g. promoting the use of forest biomass for energy generation, supporting forest owner cooperation and advice services. Various studies were carried out, e.g. on the effects of globalisation on the economic viability and competitiveness of forestry in the EU, and the development and marketing of non-market forest products and services. The Commission report on the implementation of forestry measures led to a joint Member State statement (Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) opinion) that was used by the Commission when preparing the proposed new rural development regulation for 2014-2020.

The EU FAP also supported research and technological development activities for the forest-based sector through the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7); it was a regular reference point when defining the FP7 calls and can also be seen as having helped to strengthen the Forest-based Sector Technology Platform (FTP).

#### • Improving and protecting the environment

Over the timescale of EU FAP implementation, several environmental issues became more prominent at both EU and Member State level, including the debate about the role of forests in combating climate change and the revision of the EU biodiversity strategy.

The EU FAP was an information-sharing platform for facilitating EU compliance with the obligations on climate change mitigation of the UNFCCC and its Kyoto Protocol, as well as enhancing Natura2000 implementation measures in the Member States. Various studies were carried out, e.g. on the impacts of climate change on European forests and options for adaptation, and forest dieback, storms, disturbances and weather patterns. Work towards a European forest monitoring system continued among Member States, together with cooperation on the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS). Several research projects were financed in FP7.

The follow-up of the Commission Green Paper on forest protection and information was discussed in the SFC ad-hoc working group on forest monitoring and information. The report is foreseen in 2012 as a contribution to the deliberations of the Forestry Strategy and follow-up of the EU FAP.

### • Contributing to the quality of life

Natural and man-made hazards, e.g. disastrous forest fires in 2007 (Greece) and 2010 (Portugal and Spain) and windstorms Kyrill (2007), Klaus (2009) and Xynthia (2010), directed public attention to forests, their protective functions and impact on European citizens and their quality of life.

The EU FAP contributed to the quality of life via activities which encouraged environmental education and information, maintained and enhanced the protective functions of forests and explored the potential of urban and peri-urban forests. Protective functions were addressed in several studies, and in measures for risk management, and preventive and mitigation measures. Environmental education and urban/peri-urban forests were a target for many activities at Member State level. At EU level, sharing of information took place in SFC meetings and at workshops.

The EU FAP has been instrumental in maintaining the social and cultural aspects of forests on the forestry agenda, thus emphasising this important dimension alongside economic and environmental issues.

### • Fostering coordination and communication

The EU FAP contributed to fostering coordination by providing a framework for its implementation (work programme), including regular meetings sharing information between the Commission and Member States. Good practices were also shared between Member States in the SFC, and between Commission services in the Inter-Service Group on Forestry. New methods of providing information and expertise included SFC ad-hoc working groups, studies and stakeholder involvement.

Communication about the benefits of sustainable forest management was supported by sharing Member State practices and in the public procurement of wood and wood-based products, as well as by defining the EU Forest Communication Strategy. A study on public perceptions was also carried out.

### QUESTION 2: To what extent have the activities in the framework of the EU FAP contributed to the improvement of coherence and cross-sectoral cooperation in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy?

The evaluation shows that EU FAP implementation had an influence on:

- FP7 implementation for forest-related research topics
- rural development programmes and the preparation of new rural development programmes
- the inclusion of forest protective functions in policy processes e.g. on risk management and prevention.

Climate action and renewable energy targets became important during the EU FAP implementation; although the EU FAP provided a framework to address these topics, the processes were driven outside the EU FAP.

The EU FAP had an impact on national level implementation e.g. through national forest programmes (NFPs), although the approach has varied across the EU27. Most countries' national forest programme considers the EU FAP to some extent, and the evaluation investigations show at least an indirect influence of the EU FAP as an additional driver in other policies, e.g. highlighting forestry measures in rural development programmes, addressing forest-based resources in bioenergy strategy or including wood and wood products in public procurement guidelines.

The impact of the EU FAP on international forest-related processes has been weak, but there have been concrete steps to improve coherence and synergies with the pan-European FOREST EUROPE (former Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe).





### QUESTION 3: To what extent have the activities in the framework of the EU FAP contributed to balancing economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives related to forestry?

The EU FAP addressed all three dimensions of sustainable development. The need for a “balancing” approach is addressed several times not only in the EU FAP, but in other forest-related policy documents. In the implementation phase of the EU FAP, however, the three sustainable development dimensions remained largely apart from each other. There was less effort to build an integrated approach, e.g. addressing possible synergies like biodiversity targets and payments for ecosystem services / non-wood goods and services together, or possible trade-offs e.g. between wood mobilisation for energy generation and nature conservation.

Some key actions found their role more naturally at EU level (e.g. objective 1 on economic aspects, objective 2 on environmental aspects, and objective 4 on coordination and communication), whereas other activities were mainly implemented at national or even local levels (e.g. objective 3 on socio-cultural aspects, key action 5 on forest owner cooperation, and key action 18 on visibility events). The role of national or regional activities in contributing to the EU FAP goals was not fully recognised in the EU FAP implementation.

### QUESTION 4: To what extent did the EU FAP have an added value in implementing the EU Forestry Strategy?

The EU FAP operationalised the principles of the EU Forestry Strategy, providing objectives, key actions, and activities in a work programme for 2007-2011. This was beneficial, as it went beyond providing general principles, and led to a more structured approach to raising awareness and exchanging information across different levels (EU, national, international) and sectors of policy making. It had an effect on both EU and Member State processes, but on a limited scale - the Forestry Strategy does not compel or provide incentives for setting more fixed targets, as resources for implementation or for ensuring comprehensive reporting of achievements lie with Member States.

With regard to the forest-related topics covered in the EU FAP, several processes are ongoing in parallel and interlinked with impact on forestry in the EU. Consequently it is difficult to point out the added value of EU FAP implementation; developments in parallel sectors and



policy fields (climate action, energy, industry) have generated an increased interest in forests, and the EU FAP was a means to address these developments and keep forestry-specific issues on the agenda. Trying to cover these developments without it would most likely have resulted in a much more sporadic response in 2007-2011.

### QUESTION 5: Are the current objectives, key actions and activities of the EU FAP still relevant in tackling the needs the EU FAP was intended to address? To what extent is the organisational set up of the EU FAP as a whole adequate for its purpose?

The evaluation concludes that the objectives of the EU FAP as such have not changed, but that its priorities are changing due to recent developments, e.g. climate action, LULUCF (Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry) and greenhouse gas emissions targets. The Europe 2020 strategy and, for example, resource efficiency and low-carbon targets, will lead to increasing demand for renewable resources, including forest resources. There is a need to ensure the sustainable use of resources and maintain the resilience of forests facing the impact of climate change.

The organisational set-up of the EU FAP is based on existing structures, and this was largely purposeful for its implementation from 2007-2011, taking into account that the EU FAP was a voluntary instrument. The structures provided an opportunity for Member States to share information and experiences. The evaluation collected several lessons learned for discussing its follow-up: a more structured coordination would require clearer vision, target-setting and high-level political commitment to the goals defined, as well as commitment to follow up the achievements. The principles of the EU Forestry Strategy would need to be reviewed, and this process has already been started in a SFC ad-hoc working group.

# Key recommendations

**T**he EU FAP has been a means of operationalising the EU Forestry Strategy principles and coordinating action across the Member States and EU. However, there are limitations to the leverage that the EU FAP can exert on policy processes at EU level or implementation at Member State level. Without a common vision for EU forestry, the forestry sector's response to the developments in other policy areas (e.g. climate action and energy) remains weak. Without clear commitments and targets the Member State reporting to EU level continues to lack consistency.

- **In order to increase commitment to an EU Action Plan, a joint effort is needed to develop and operationalise a common vision of multi-purpose and sustainable forest management.**
- **In order to support the effects and impacts of an EU Action Plan, strengthened instruments and a structure for mutual information exchange and joint action are needed.**

It is important that the outcome of this EU FAP ex-post evaluation is discussed in an open dialogue within the Commission, in the Standing Forestry Committee and the Council Working Party on Forestry, as well as in the Member States and in consultation with the key stakeholders. In the process of defining the follow-up after the EU Forest Action Plan, the viewpoints of Member States, the Commission and various stakeholders are valuable. But the debate needs to reach beyond the mere EU FAP implementation in the forestry sector, to include beneficiaries of the intended measures at large. Forests can contribute to the goals defined in the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. But in order to ensure this contribution, the economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects of forests, as well as the potential trade-offs between the three dimensions of sustainable development need to be recognised for a vision of forestry in the EU.

