

## The EU forest strategy for 2030

Forests are essential for our health and wellbeing, and the health of the planet. They are rich in biodiversity and are hugely important in the fight against climate change. They provide us with clean water, food and materials, stabilise soils, and reduce the risk of disasters. That is why the EU wants to improve the quantity and quality of its forests and strengthen their protection and restoration.

You are listening to 'Raising the game, better legislation' and in this podcast we will find out more about the new EU forest strategy for 2030.

Europe is one of the most forest-rich regions in the world: around 40% of its land area is covered by forests, which host most of the terrestrial species of animals and plants native to our continent.

Forests offer numerous benefits: for example, they act as carbon sinks, absorbing carbon dioxide from the air and helping to combat climate change. Currently, they absorb around 10% of the total EU emissions. Moreover, forests provide clean water and aid in regulating water cycles and decrease the risks of landslides and floods.

They are also vital for local economies because they create employment opportunities, they offer materials that can be sustainably used and contribute to maintaining conditions necessary for farming.

In recent years, forests have undergone significant changes. They face various challenges that affect how they work (function) and their ability to provide different benefits to nature and people. Although forests in Europe are getting healthier in some ways, many of them remain at risk due to issues like pollution in the air and water, loss of habitats and diverse wildlife, wildfires and drought and the growth of cities into forested areas.

The European Union has always been aware of the importance of forests. Already in 1998 the EU Forestry Strategy highlighted the challenges facing the EU forests as well as common objectives and guiding principles in forest policy.

Adopted in 2021, the Forest Strategy for 2030 for the European Union aims to strengthen the biodiversity objectives and the protection, restoration and resilience of Europe's forests. Its main frame of reference, the European Green Deal, puts these ecosystems at the centre of a decarbonized society, to be achieved at the latest by 2050.

The new EU Forest Strategy will improve the quantity and quality of our forests by protecting and restoring them. Legislators have introduced a strict protection for the remaining primary and old-growth forests and established legally binding nature restoration targets. They also created payment schemes for forests owners and managers for ecosystem services. It is a tool that foresees financial incentives to provide forest ecosystem services other than the provision of wood.

The goal is to ensure that forests are managed sustainably. To achieve this, the EU is promoting the uptake of sustainably harvested wood in the construction sector and win-win measures for all in sustainable forest management.

The strategy also aims to guarantee a better understanding of what is happening in our forests. It will improve the monitoring and ensure that Member States develop their own plan for protecting their forests.

Under the European Green Deal, the EU has committed to planting 3 billion additional trees by 2030 and increasing the resilience and biodiversity of existing forest ecosystems. Planting must be done in full respect of ecological principles. This means that the right tree has to be planted in the right place and for the right purpose. The EU and Member States are implementing various policies and initiatives supporting forest restoration to achieve this goal. These include funding for reforestation and afforestation projects, sustainable forest management practices and the development of green corridors.

By restoring degraded forest ecosystems and promoting sustainable forest management practices, Europe can help to mitigate climate change and preserve biodiversity all over the world.

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