



WWF and IKEA are working together on forests, cotton, water and climate to protect landscapes and enhance biodiversity.



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FACT SHEET: FORESTS – CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Responsible forest management for sustainable development in Central and Eastern Europe

The Central and Eastern Europe region harbours some of Europe's largest remaining old-growth forests and wilderness areas, home to bears, lynx and wolves. The region's forests also provide a wide range of ecosystem services of great economic and intrinsic value. They are an economically important source of timber and income for local communities, carbon storage, clean water, spiritual values and a basis for green business opportunities. But they face numerous challenges, including illegal logging, the demands of forest-dependent communities, economic disadvantages and the increasingly damaging impacts of climate change.

WWF and IKEA have been collaborating in Central and Eastern Europe for more than 20 years, focusing on four countries – Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Under the partnership, we have been working together to reduce pressure on forests and to promote a sustainable circular bioeconomy. We have helped protect high conservation value forests with a particular focus on old-growth forests, and promoted responsible forest management and transparency in trade. We have also contributed to improving legislation to reflect responsible forest management principles in line with EU regulations such as Natura 2000 and the EU Timber Regulation.

Our partnership's work has led to identification, mapping and protection of the most significant old-growth forests in the region, with nearly 400,000 hectares now formally protected throughout the four countries.

WHAT WE PLAN TO ACHIEVE BY 2023

- Develop a new forest policy vision in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine that results in a restructured forest governance framework to address current and future environmental and socioeconomic challenges
- Enhance biodiversity cover, climate resilience, regeneration and carbon storage in the region's forest landscapes
- Increase the quality of FSC certification, as well as maintain and extend the area of FSC-certified forests in Central and Eastern Europe
- Mobilize wide support for a new forest vision, including among the general public



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We have also improved forest governance by supporting the increase of Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification in the region: the FSC certified area in Slovakia alone more than doubled between 2017 and 2020. Across the four countries, around 40% of the total forest area is now FSC certified (9.97 million hectares).

But we want to go further. Today, we are looking to reset national forest strategies across the whole Central and Eastern European region, while maintaining existing best practices. We want to see biodiversity-rich, sustainably managed and climate-resilient forest landscapes that provide a full range of ecosystem services and goods that contribute to the well-being of local communities. In collaboration with various stakeholders in each country, we are developing and advocating a new policy vision for forests and how they are managed and regulated. By together demonstrating new practices on the ground and building public support, we're working to turn this vision into reality.

WHAT WE'RE DOING

Transforming forest governance – a new forest policy vision

We're involved in developing a national forest policy vision in each country through a multistakeholder participatory approach. The idea is to obtain a broad consensus on key principles and a strategic direction for a modern, competitive, and sustainable forest sector, which will lead to national forest strategies, policies and action plans. Various processes are already under way in each country, and we aim to ensure they are harmonized, ambitious and inclusive, leading to positive change on the ground.

Guided by a shared vision, we want to find strategic trigger points to transform forest governance in each country. In Romania, for example, an overhaul of the system for tackling illegal logging offers an opportunity to establish a real paradigm shift in terms of forest management standards and timber traceability. Slovakia, meanwhile, faces a shortage of timber of harvestable age by 2030 because of climate change impacts – so there's an urgent need to set sustainable harvest limits and improve climate resilience. As well as helping to shape new laws and policies, we advocate to amend existing legislation that undermines the implementation of responsible forest management principles. Pilot projects are being set up to test and promote innovative approaches like digital and AI systems for monitoring wood traceability, and develop climate-smart forest management and payments for ecosystem services schemes.

PROJECT LOCATION





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Addressing nature and climate issues

Among the objectives of the partnership is to ensure that forest landscapes across the region contribute to biodiversity conservation and restoration, and deliver ecosystem services, while storing carbon and strengthening climate resilience. This includes identifying and protecting all the old-growth forests and other high conservation value areas, in support of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. We're developing and demonstrating innovative approaches such as climate-smart and close-to-nature forest management – a concept proposed in the EU Forest Strategy for 2030, which aims to improve the conservation values and climate resilience of multifunctional, managed forests. We're also promoting new conservation concepts for biodiversity, such as dead wood management for forests and the conservation of fragile ecosystems with high biodiversity value such as riparian forests, wetlands and natural sparse woodlands.

Increasing responsible forest management

Market demand from IKEA for more sustainable wood has been a driving force for better forest management in Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, helping to significantly expand the area of forests certified by the FSC. The aim is to ensure this trend continues, and to encourage and support similar developments in Slovakia, where FSC certification has been slower to take off. As well as increasing the area of certified forest, we're seeking to improve the quality by engaging with FSC in the development of national forest stewardship standards and empowering stakeholders to play an active role during the certification process. We're also providing education, training and capacity building so forest managers can meet the specific requirements, particularly around biodiversity conservation and environmental protection, a key strategic approach for reaching long-term sustainability.

Mobilizing support

Adopting the proposed forest vision and translating it into action requires strong, consistent political will in each country – and for that, we need public support. People in the region care about forests, and we want to help build increased knowledge and understanding of the challenges forests face, the importance of the biodiversity they hold and the need for sustainable timber consumption. We aim to ensure communities and the local economy benefit from responsible forest management for sustainable development.



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