

The SMURF project will promote the profitability of small forest properties throughout Europe.

- Kick-off held in Soria to launch the 4-year Horizon Europe project SMURF, aimed at empowering 20 million forest owners across Europe.
- With a budget of €5.4 million and 10 partners from 7 countries, SMURF will deliver training, digital tools, and policy recommendations to revitalise small forests.
- The project will promote closer-to-nature forestry and develop business models for non-timber products and environmental services to boost rural economies.

(Madrid, Spain – 2nd of February, 2024) - The SMURF project will work over the next four years to enable 20 million forest owners across Europe to generate economic activity in forests, while managing forests to conserve and adapt to climate change. The new project is part of the Horizon Europe call, the European Union's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation for the period 2021-2027, the most demanding in terms of scientific and technical quality.

SMURF, the project for forest owners, held its launch meeting in Soria on 1 and 2 February, attended by all the members of the consortium, and will run for 48 months, until December 2028.

In the European Union there are many forests belonging to small landowners who face the difficulty of managing them and achieving profitability from their forests, which leads them to abandonment. One of the results that the project aims to achieve is not only to avoid this but also to create new business models that involve the entire forestry value chain and create jobs in rural areas thanks to the economic activity generated in the forests.

The SMURF project (Sustainable Management models and value chains for small Forests) will develop new European-wide organisational and business models based on closer-to-nature forestry practices, which will emphasise the valorisation of forest products; provide essential resources, such as training programmes, digital tools and support structures, to empower forest owners and

stakeholders; and contribute to the establishment of standardised policies and payment systems at regional, national and European level.

The project has seven action lines. One of them is to characterise forest owners. "A great example is the work done by the Soria Forestry Association (Asfoso), recovering the Montes de Socios," said project coordinator Álvaro Picardo.

Another one is to analyse the very different legal framework across Europe. In addition, new business models will be developed around non-timber resources such as mushrooms, resin or game, and even payment systems for environmental services will be developed, so that foresters get new income for the work they do. Finally, "and perhaps most importantly, is the transfer and extension of these solutions, which has to be done hand in hand with local, regional and state administrations with the European Union as a whole", Picardo emphasised.

All these lines of work will contribute to improving knowledge and skills in forest management for the owners of small properties. According to the European Forest Institute (EFI-European Forest Institute) in general, landholdings in Europe range in size from less than one hectare to several million hectares. However, almost 90% of private forest holdings are less than 10 hectares, and many are even much smaller.

Project partners

The consortium is composed of ten partners from seven different countries: FUNDACIÓN CENTRO DE SERVICIOS Y PROMOCIÓN FORESTAL Y DE SU INDUSTRIA DE CASTILLA Y LEÓN (CESEFOR), Spain; INNOVAWOOD ASBL (IWOOD) – Belgium; UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE (UNIFI) – Italy; BLUEBILOBA STARTUP INNOVATIVA SRL (BLUEBILOBA) – Italy; XYLOFUTUR PRODUITS ET MATERIAUX DES FORETS CULTIVEES (xylofutur) – France; FUNDACIÓN INSTITUTO INTERNACIONAL DE INVESTIGACION EN INTELIGENCIA ARTIFICIAL Y CIENCIAS DE LA COMPUTACION (AIRINS) – Spain; INSTITUTO POLITECNICO DE BRAGANCA (IPB) – Portugal; NEPCON FMBA (PBYNAT) – Denmark; MILIEU CONSULTING (MILIEU) – Belgium; CONTACTICA SL (CTA) – Spain.

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About SMURF: The SMURF project, aligned with the EU's Forest Strategy, promotes sustainable forest management through innovative Closer to Nature Sylviculture practices (CNS) and a harmonized European



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Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) system. By tailoring solutions for small forest properties, SMURF enhances carbon farming, biodiversity, and forest product valorization. With a multidisciplinary approach and diverse stakeholder engagement, SMURF provides holistic sustainability solutions across the forest-based value chain.

Ten organizations from Spain, Belgium, Italy, France, Portugal, and Denmark collaborate with a translational, multidisciplinary, and multi-actor approach. This project is granted by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) under the Horizon Europe program.

For more information about the SMURF project, visit www.smurfproject.eu.

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