

Valladolid Hosts the Launch of the European Project “SMURF”

- SMURF, a Horizon Europe project tackling forest land fragmentation and promoting the management of small-scale forest holdings, was officially presented in Valladolid.
- The INNOVAForONE event brought together dozens of forest experts from across Europe.

Valladolid (Spain), 19 April 2024. The Horizon Europe **project SMURF** was officially launched during the **INNOVAForONE conference**, held on 18–19 April at the **Institute for Business Competitiveness of Castilla y León (ICE)**, in Arroyo de la Encomienda, Valladolid (Spain).

Álvaro Picardo, project coordinator and Deputy Director for Innovation in Forest Policy at Cesefor (Centre for Forest Services and Promotion of Forest-Based Industries in Castilla y León), introduced the project to the public.

SMURF aims to strengthen forest-based value chains—from sustainable timber construction to biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation—by focusing on small-scale forest holdings (SFHs) across the European Union.

According to the FAO’s Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA-2020), the EU accounts for less than 4% of the world’s forest area, yet it contributes **around 12% of global timber production annually**. In 2015, the EU forest industry also generated 27% of the sector’s global added value. European forests generate over €1,000 per hectare annually and deliver a return exceeding €1 billion per forested hectare per year—representing 27% of the global total.

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) is more widely implemented in the EU than in many other parts of the world, with highly developed value chains generating a wide range of forest-based products and services. However, a significant management gap persists between publicly owned forests and the predominantly small-scale private holdings.

SMURF aims to identify key solutions to bridge this gap and improve the performance of small forest holdings, while enhancing the alignment between

forestry, agriculture, and livestock sectors. Its goal is to improve forest conditions, generate economic activity, and boost rural employment.

During the event, Picardo described SMURF as an ambitious and transformative initiative that “seeks to revitalise forest-based value chains rooted in products and services from small forest holdings, taking the EU Forest Strategy 2030 as its starting point.”

Through the creation of an international collaboration platform, SMURF will connect forest owners and managers across Europe to foster new, sustainable and environmentally respectful business models. In Picardo's words, “This European HUB will serve as a collaborative platform offering practical solutions to the needs of small-scale forest properties across Europe. SMURF will create new opportunities for the sustainable use of forest resources, contributing to the wellbeing of current and future generations.”

The platform will bring together forest owners' associations and cooperatives—key enablers of smallholder development—alongside industrial actors, innovation centres, and forest authorities. Together, they aim to revitalise small-scale forest plots and prevent land abandonment.

SMURF will also propose new business models “to improve the profitability and productivity of forest holdings, which are essential for preserving and enhancing forest biodiversity and ecosystem services.” The project will promote Close-to-Nature Forestry approaches and advance ecosystem service markets, with a special focus on forest carbon credits and biodiversity credits.

The **INNOVAForONE** conference is part of the Horizon Europe project **ONEforest**, which held its final event in Valladolid. Cesefor is a consortium partner of the project. By bringing together representatives from five European cooperation networks and five leading forest-related Horizon Europe projects, the event attracted a significant number of experts under the theme “*Innovations and networks in European forestry*”.

In addition to providing a platform to share the latest trends and innovations in the sector, INNOVAForONE also showcased other **Horizon Europe** initiatives aiming to transform the future of European forestry.

About SMURF: The SMURF project, aligned with the EU's Forest Strategy, promotes sustainable forest management through innovative Closer to Nature Silviculture practices (CNS) and a harmonized European Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) system. By tailoring solutions for small forest properties, SMURF enhances

PRESS RELEASE

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.

Contact information:

Communication team: communication@smurfproject.eu