

SMURF SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES ITS SECOND CASCADE FUNDING CALL, ACHIEVING BROAD PARTICIPATION AND NEAR-COMPLETE BUDGET ALLOCATION

- **€823,000 awarded to support innovation, governance, and capacity-building in small forest owners' organisations across Europe**
- **58 entities selected for award, 23 more compared to the first call, from 17 EU countries**

(Soria, Spain – 5th of December 2025) - **The SMURF project has officially concluded its Second Cascade Funding Call**, marking a major milestone in its mission to empower small forest owners' organisations across Europe and enhance their capacity to engage in sustainable and innovative forest management practices. Building on the success of the first call, this second round significantly expanded participation, deepened cross-border engagement, and strengthened the implementation of practical solutions designed for Small Forest Holdings (SFHs).

Running from 9 April to 2 July 2025, the call made €825,000 available to forest owners' associations, cooperatives, federations, and confederations in all EU Member States. Thanks to strong sector engagement, SMURF successfully **awarded 823.000€**, 99.8% of the total budget, reaching **58 stakeholders across all 17 countries** that submitted proposals after applying a rigorous scoring methodology and objective criteria by the evaluation committee. **Grant amounts per entity ranged from €3,500 to €48,000**, depending on the activities member to be awarded.

Participation was distributed across six thematic activities, each addressing the diverse needs and priorities of small forest owners under the framework of the SMURF project. **Activity 1 (Communication & Conference Participation)** was the most popular, with **58 entities receiving funding**, which emphasises the importance of visibility, networking, and knowledge sharing for forest owner organizations. **Activity 4 (CNS Training Sessions)** also recorded strong participation, with funding granted to **32 entities**, reflecting the relevance of practical Close-to-Nature Silviculture training. **40 entities** will be funded to develop **Activity 6 (Territorial Working Groups)**, which seeks to engage in regional cooperation and structured dialogue to strengthen governance in fragmented forest landscapes.

Meanwhile, **Activity 2 (Implementation of a Pilot Project on a new business opportunity for SFHs)**, **Activity 3 (Setup of a Close-to-Nature Silviculture demonstration stand)**, and **Activity 5 (Development of a Payments for Ecosystem Services pilot carbon project)**, corresponds to the implementation of pilot projects, which are expected to have a greater impact. **10 entities** were awarded funding for Activities 2 and 3, and **5** for Activity 5.

This second edition has received a total of **67 applications**, representing a **22% increase** over the previous call and highlighting growing interest in capacity-building, cooperation, and innovation within Europe's small-scale forestry sector. This second call also welcomed participation from three countries, Finland, Germany, and Hungary, for the first time, demonstrating the expanding reach of SMURF's support mechanisms. Spain, Italy and France led with the higher number of applicants, confirming the dynamic involvement of organisations in Southern and Western Europe.

The call resulted in a geographically balanced group of beneficiaries, as all regions according to **EuroVoc macro-regional classification** are represented: Southern Europe (26%), Central and Eastern Europe (24%), Western Europe (24%) and Northern Europe (7%).



With this second call, SMURF has **reinforced its role as a catalyst for innovation, cooperation and capacity-building** among Europe's small forest owners' organisations. The high level of participation, **the strong interest in practical training and cooperation initiatives**, and the nearly complete allocation of the available budget demonstrate the sector's readiness to embrace new approaches that support sustainability, digitalisation, governance, and climate resilience. As the project continues, the funded organisations will implement actions that bring tangible, real-world improvements to forest management practices and local forest-based communities across Europe, reinforcing the long-term vision of a more sustainable, empowered, and interconnected network of small forest owners.

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 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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