

## SMURF PROJECT HOLDS FIFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN BRAGANÇA TO ADVANCE CLOSER-TO-NATURE FORESTRY AND SUPPORT SMALL FOREST OWNERS

- *The SMURF consortium gathered in Bragança, Portugal, from 14 to 16 April 2026 to review progress and coordinate the next phase of project implementation.*
- *Partners participated in workshops on governance, training, carbon schemes, biodiversity and policy guidelines, alongside field visits to Portuguese forest areas.*

**(Bragança, Portugal – 20 April 2026)** – The SMURF project (Sustainable Management models and value chains for small Forests) successfully held its Fifth General Assembly in Bragança, Portugal, from 14 to 16 April 2026. Hosted by the Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), the meeting brought together consortium partners from across Europe to assess project progress, strengthen collaboration, and align priorities for the upcoming implementation phase.

The three-day meeting opened with a general review of the project's current status, led by project coordinator Álvaro Picardo Nieto (CESEFOR), followed by a series of strategic workshops focused on improving coordination and ensuring the effective delivery of SMURF's objectives. Partners discussed the functioning of the Advisory Board, the development of the project's educational and training framework, and the creation of territorial working groups to support local stakeholder engagement.

A key part of the first day was dedicated to transversal discussions across work packages, including business models for sustainable forest management and the development of a portfolio of Closer-to-Nature Silviculture (CNS) services. These sessions helped define practical pathways to increase the profitability and resilience of small forest holdings while preserving ecosystem services. The consortium also began preparations for the project's second EU conference and final event, which will play an important role in sharing SMURF's results with policymakers and key stakeholders.

On the second day, partners focused on some of the project's core technical areas. Workshops explored the next steps in the CNS wave methodology, the development of the LAURUS network, and the design of the SMURF carbon scheme. Additional sessions addressed biodiversity indicators and policy guidelines, with discussions centred on how to better connect project results generated at national level with European policy frameworks. The day concluded with a coordination session on

dissemination and communication activities planned for the period from June 2026 to June 2027.

The final day featured a field trip to forest areas in Bragança and Vila Pouca de Aguiar. Participants visited forest intervention zones (ZIFs) managed by the APATA Association and explored local forest management practices together with AGUIAR Floresta. These visits provided valuable first-hand insight into practical approaches to sustainable forest management, landscape resilience and stakeholder collaboration in Portuguese forest territories.

During the field visit, partners also had the opportunity to engage in discussions with local forest owners, gaining valuable insight into their main concerns. Among the key challenges highlighted were the need for increased land clearing to prevent forest fires, difficulties in finding skilled labour, and the importance of accelerating replanting processes following wildfire events.

The Bragança General Assembly marked another important milestone for the SMURF project, reinforcing the consortium's shared commitment to developing innovative tools, governance models and value chains that support small forest owners across Europe. For detailed information about the SMURF project cascade funding, eligibility criteria, and application process, please visit the [project website](#).

**About SMURF:** It is a Horizon Europe project, aligned with the EU's Forest Strategy, that addresses the problems of Small Forest Holdings (lack of professionalism, low profitability, fragmented ownership, risk of abandonment and insufficient professional support) attempting to identify and develop viable solutions from across EU and worldwide. Including innovative business models and business opportunities, simple Systems of Payments for Ecosystem Services, Joint Management and Forest Land Consolidation, improved support systems and simplified regulation, that could promote sustainable forest management. By tailoring solutions for small forest properties, SMURF enhances carbon farming, biodiversity, and forest products' 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.

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