Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

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RE-ENFORCE

Online Transnational Stakeholders Workshop Report

DT1.1.2. 1. Online Transnational Stakeholders Workshop for understanding nature and extent of forest degradation, drivers, current management governance issues

Version 1

11 2024

SUMMARY

A. 1. Introduction to the Workshop

On November 19, 2024, an international online stakeholder workshop was held via Zoom, organised by the Croatian Forestry Institute as part of the RE-ENFORCE project. The workshop aimed to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and exchange experiences on challenges and solutions for restoring degraded forests in the partner countries.

The primary focus was on forests affected by pests such as bark beetles, drought, wind damage, wildfires, and diseases.

Workshop Objectives:

- To gather and analyse expert opinions on the definitions of forest degradation.
- To explore the role of active management in addressing forest restoration challenges.
- To discuss species migration and potential solutions for issues such as seed shortages and the high costs of reforestation.
- Participants:
- The workshop brought together forestry experts, EU representatives, scientists, and representatives of public and private forestry sectors from the project's partner countries.

B. 2. Welcoming and Opening

The workshop was opened by Debojyoti Chakraborty (Project Coordinator - RE-ENFORCE, BFW, Vienna), who delivered a welcoming speech and briefly introduced the RE-ENFORCE project. He also introduced the workshop's main theme, focusing on forest degradation, its definition, and the challenges related to the restoration of degraded forests.

Following this, the participants of the workshop were introduced.

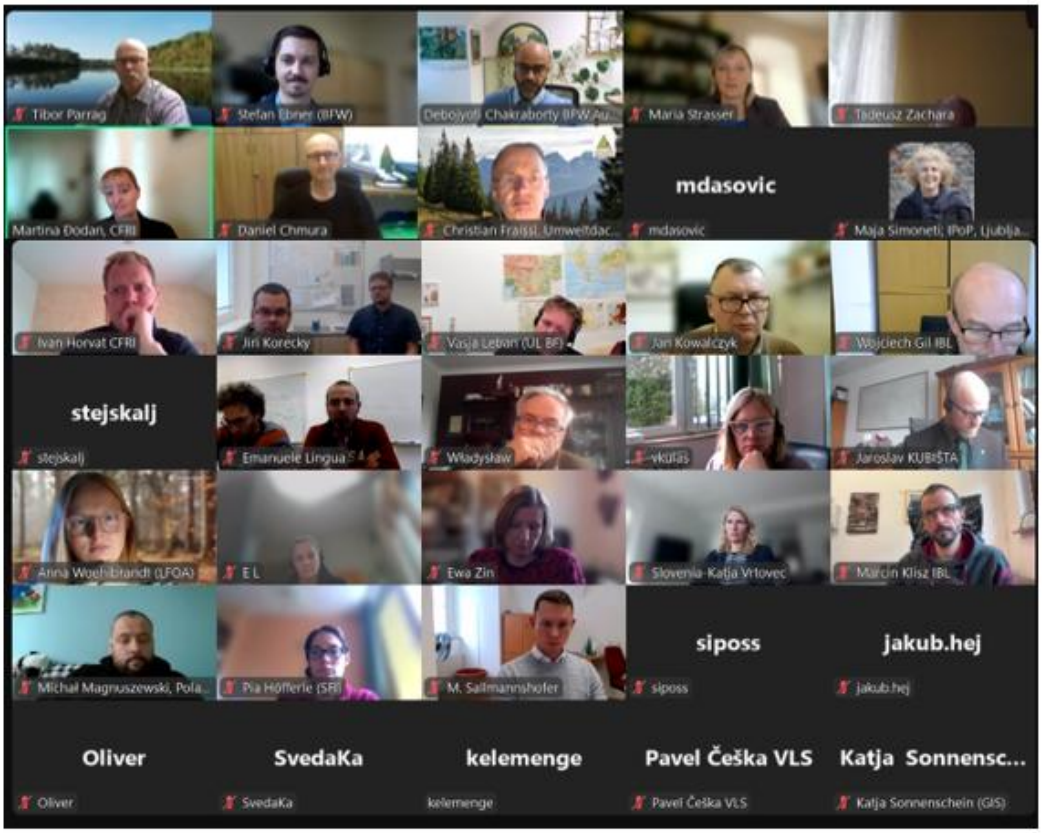

Figure 1. Screenshot of the workshop participants

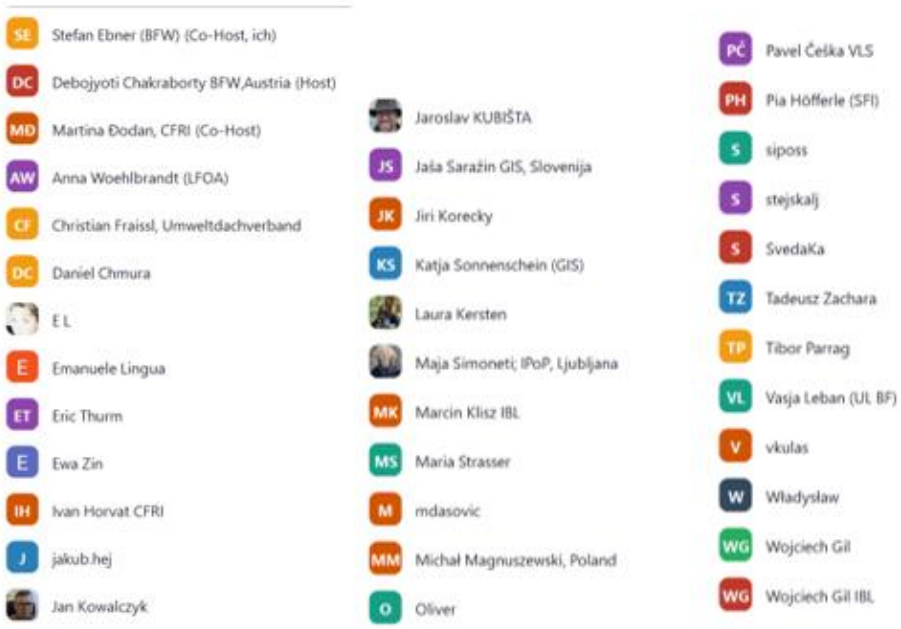

Figure 2. List of the participants

C.3. Session 1: Summary of challenges for restoring degraded forests in the RE-ENFORCE partner countries

This session was led by Martina Đodan, PhD from the Croatian Forest Research Institute. This session aimed to provide a summary of the responses from the project stakeholders to the pre-set questions related to the challenges of restoring degraded forests in the project partner countries.

Q1: What are the main challenges in forest restoration (key drivers)?

SUMMARY of the answers

In European countries, challenges to forest restoration vary, but common factors include climate change, invasive species, harmful insects, and human impact. In Austria, Christian Fraissl from the Austrian Umbrella Organization for the Environment raised concerns about the impact of invasive species, bark beetles, and biodiversity loss, emphasizing the need to integrate biodiversity conservation into forest landscape restoration. Maria Strasser from Hoyos Estate and Forest Management Horn highlighted climate change, droughts, and pest issues like bark beetles, along with the labour and financial challenges in reforestation efforts. In Croatia, Valentina Kulaš and Mandica Dasović from Croatian Forests Ltd. pointed out the threats posed by fires, droughts, extreme weather, and new pests, with restoration often being a reactive process. Oliver Vlainić from the Croatian Forestry Society also noted the increasing frequency of extreme weather events. In the Czech Republic, Pavel Češka from Military Forests and Farms emphasized the need for sustainable timber yields and adjustments in forest management practices, while Jaromír Šimonek from a private company discussed wildlife pressure and drought in the Kokořínsko region. Jaroslav Kubišta from the Forest Management Institute highlighted the large-scale spruce dieback due to bark beetles. In Poland, Michał Magnuszewski from the General Directorate of State Forests and Daniel Chmura from the Institute of Dendrology pointed out the challenges of climate change and new insect species. Władysław Pędziwiatr from the Polish Association of Private Forest Owners called for expanded forestation programs and better monitoring. In Germany, Knut Sturm (local forest manager) and Peter Rabe from the BDF (German Forestry Union) noted drought and bark beetles as key issues. In Italy, Massimiliano Fontanive from Veneto Agricoltura and Giuseppe Menegus from the Veneto Region discussed the financial, logistical, and bureaucratic challenges of forest restoration after natural disturbances. All these countries face the need to adapt their forestry strategies to address the ongoing impacts of climate change and emerging ecological challenges.

Q2: Which of these challenges will become more severe under climate change?

SUMMARY of the answers

Climate change is expected to intensify forest restoration challenges across Europe, with many stakeholders highlighting its increasing severity. In Austria, Christian Fraissl (Austrian Umbrella Organization for the Environment) and Maria Strasser (Hoyos Estate and Forest Management Horn) both emphasize that climate change will intensify existing issues, such as weather extremes and pest outbreaks. In Croatia, Valentina Kulaš and Mandica Dasović (Croatian Forests Ltd.) note that climate change worsens ecological conditions, affecting species survival and complicating restoration efforts, with a focus on soil preservation, selecting appropriate tree species, and fire protection. Oliver Vlainić (Croatian Forestry Society) also discusses the challenges posed by shifting tree species ranges and the need for adjusted forest management practices. In

the Czech Republic, Pavel Češka (Military Forests and Farms) and Jaromír Šimonek (Dvůr Lobeč) cite drought and altered microclimates as major challenges. Jaroslav Kubišta (Forest Management Institute) identifies drought, wind, snow, and biotic factors as key threats. In Poland, Michał Magnuszewski (General Directorate of State Forests) and Daniel Chmura (Institute of Dendrology) highlight the impact of weather extremes, invasive species, and the challenges in species selection. In Germany, Knut Sturm (Forest Manager), Peter Rabe (BDF), Robert Born (Forstverein), and Matthias Schwabe (Müritz National Park) all stress the increasing severity of drought. In Italy, Massimiliano Fontanive (Veneto Agricoltura) and Giuseppe Menegus (Regione del Veneto) agree that climate change will worsen difficulties in species selection and forest management. Overall, the common theme across these countries is that climate change will make existing forest management and restoration challenges more complex, requiring adjustments in both practices and policies.

Q3: What is the current approach to restoring degraded forests?

SUMMARY of the answers

Efforts to restore and manage European forests involve diverse strategies tailored to local conditions and challenges, with stakeholders highlights both preventive measures and post-disturbance actions. Across countries, there is a strong focus on enhancing forest resilience through species diversification, integrating scientific research, and adapting strategies to future climatic conditions. Assisted migration and mixed deciduous forests are commonly favoured, as seen in Austria, where Maria Strasser highlights the importance of mechanised maintenance and game population control. Similarly, in Croatia, Valentina Kulaš and Mandica Dasović emphasize rapid rehabilitation of degraded areas through preparatory work and regulated planting materials, while noting challenges such as labour shortages. In the Czech Republic, Pavel Češka and Jaroslav Kubišta advocate transforming monocultures into diverse stands, managing invasive vegetation, and adhering to forest laws that promote species suited to site conditions. German stakeholders like Knut Sturm and Robert Born focus on preventive thinning, promoting natural regeneration, and balancing ecological and economic considerations, especially under pressures from wind, bark beetles, and drought. Italy's approach, represented by Massimiliano Fontanive and Giuseppe Menegus, emphasizes reforestation in alpine regions for protective functions, using locally adapted species and multidisciplinary strategies. Overall, key themes include fostering diversity, addressing game pressure, using natural regeneration, and ensuring strategic, site-specific adaptation to future forest conditions.

Q4: Is there a need to change the restoration strategy to align with climate change?

SUMMARY of the answers

There is a consensus among experts from various countries on the need to adapt forest restoration strategies to address the impacts of climate change. In Austria, stakeholders like Christian Fraissl emphasize the importance of balancing ecosystem services with biodiversity conservation, while Maria Strasser highlights the role of efficient water management and scientific monitoring. In Croatia, Valentina Kulaš calls for faster, expert-led responses, and Mandica Dasović stresses the urgency of aligning restoration with legal frameworks. In the Czech Republic, efforts focus on natural regeneration, reduced clear-cutting, and the inclusion of site-adapted species, as noted by Pavel Češka and Jaroslav Kubišta. Polish experts, like Michał Magnuszewski, advocate for maximizing natural processes and appropriate species selection. Germany focuses on continuous cover forestry, promoting site-appropriate species and experimenting with planting strategies to manage risks, with voices like Knut Sturm and Peter Rabe leading these discussions. Meanwhile, Italy highlights the need for resilient forests, as emphasized by Massimiliano Fontanive, and stresses flexibility and innovation in restoration, as noted by Giuseppe Menegus. Overall, the shared goal is to build resilient, diverse forests that can better withstand the challenges of a changing climate.

Q5: Are there legal challenges in forest restoration?

SUMMARY of the answers

Legal challenges in forest restoration are widespread, stemming from complex regulations, inflexibility, and limited support mechanisms. In Austria, Christian Fraissl emphasizes the need for cross-sectoral collaboration to align the NRL with diverse stakeholders, while Maria Strasser highlights barriers in EU and hunting laws, advocating for simplified regulations and better subsidies. In Croatia, Valentina Kulaš and Mandica Dasović point to restrictive provenance rules, procurement delays, and unresolved property rights in private forests as significant obstacles, urging for legislative flexibility. The Czech Republic faces issues with long decision-making processes for hunting and assisted migration, as well as funding gaps, according to Pavel Češka and Jaroslav Kubišta. Poland grapples with rigid forest management laws and limited clarity on seed transfer rules, as noted by Michał Magnuszewski. In Germany, experts like Knut Sturm and Peter Rabe criticise short reforestation timelines and advocate for adaptive definitions of forests and more flexible seed and fencing laws. In Italy, Massimiliano Fontanive calls for automatic intervention authorizations in protected areas to expedite restoration, highlighting contradictions in current legal frameworks. Across countries, reforms are needed to streamline regulations and provide clearer, more flexible frameworks to support climate-adapted forest restoration.

Q6: Lessons learned from successful or unsuccessful restoration efforts.

SUMMARY of the answers

The lessons learned from successful and unsuccessful forest restoration efforts across various countries highlight the importance of adapting to specific conditions, learning from nature, and improving management practices. In Austria, Christian Fraissl highlights successful restoration projects in water-influenced ecosystems and the integration of biodiversity-enhancing practices in certified forests, while Maria Strasser reflects on past mistakes, such as rushing reforestation efforts without a phased approach, leading to maintenance backlogs. She also points to challenges with importing seedlings and calls for clearer legal frameworks for assisted migration. In Croatia, Valentina Kulaš advises against using pioneer species like pine after fires, favouring natural regeneration, while Mandica Dasović stresses the impact of weather conditions and the importance of timely intervention, especially to prevent damage from livestock. Oliver Vlainić emphasizes the need for better coordination with water management and more careful tree species selection based on nature's recovery processes. The Czech Republic experienced success in restoring large areas damaged by the bark beetle, with Pavel Češka noting the effectiveness of shelterwood systems and selective forest management, while Jaroslav Kubišta highlights successful reforestation mobilization but also recalls an unsuccessful restoration in the 1990s due to improper soil preparation. In Poland, Michał Magnuszewski underscores the importance of silvicultural methods that align with natural processes, and Władysław Pędziwiatr suggests that Poland's policy could serve as a model. In Germany, Knut Sturm shares positive experiences from reforesting agricultural land using local seeds and fencing with minimal adjustments, while Matthias Schwabe reflects that natural succession in national parks has been a successful, low-intervention approach. In Italy, Massimiliano Fontanive highlights the success of the Life VAIA project, combining agroforestry with typical forestry interventions, and Giuseppe Menegus shares both successes, such as multi-species reforestation, and failures, like a larch plantation that failed due to high temperatures. Fontanive also points to the rapid management of bark beetle outbreaks as a success but stresses the importance of having a robust road network for effective forest management, which remains a challenge due to legal limitations. Overall, these lessons highlight the need for flexibility, a deeper understanding of local conditions, and a balanced approach that respects natural processes while adapting to emerging challenges.

D.4. CONCLUSIONS

Stakeholders' conclusion:

- Overall conclusion:
  - Yes, to active management but not to obligatory
  - Intersectoral cooperation is needed.
  - Changes in the laws are needed, i.e. they should be more flexible
  - A common understanding of the most important drivers exists between partner countries
- Individual conclusion:
  - Austria and Czech Republic: Do not segregate functions
  - Italy: Convergence of climate change forest degradation issues, some differences in management and social issues. Some differences in the latitudinal gradient, current country legislations are not aligned with global/EU future perceptions and scenarios
  - Germany: Legal issues with assisted tree migration and alternative tree species across Europe
  - Czech Republic: The definition should follow the purpose. Adaptation measures should go hand in hand with mitigation. We should integrate functions and strive for multifunctionality wherever possible.
  - Slovenia: Definitions are crucial – properly defined concepts will facilitate implementation. Management decisions (e.g. style and location) – taken in a participatory fashion. Forests are only one ecosystem in a landscape and interact with other ecosystems. Regarding climate change and other development challenges, it is crucial for the future management of forests that it becomes more comprehensive and integrated, so it should be based on a good multidisciplinary situation assessment and a strategy that will involve a diverse set of professionals and actors into the game including the public, civil society, forest users and the owners.
  - Austria: active management is needed but integrating biodiversity conservation.
  - Poland: Active management under the function of forest: social, production, protection.

Workshop hosts conclusions:

- Across all stakeholders, there is a common understanding of what will happen in the future due to climate change.
- Legislative issues and uncertainties
- Cross-sectoral cooperation is needed
- Segregation of forest functions or multifunctional forest management
- Awareness of forest production material and seedlings
- Assisted migration is an important issue for all countries. We are on a good way to simplify assisted population migration (not assisted species migration)
- Definition EUDR must be considered, there is a link between deforestation and degradation

E. 5. AGENDA

09:00 - 09:15	Introduction to the RE-ENFORCE Project and welcoming the participants by Debojyoti Chakraborty (Project Coordinator- RE-ENFORCE, BFW, Vienna)
09:15 – 09:30	Short introduction of participants
09:30 - 09:45	Summary of challenges for restoring degraded forests in the RE-ENFORCE partner countries by Martina Dodan (CFRI)
09:45 - 09:50	Short break
09:50 - 10:50	Joint discussions (moderated by RE-ENFORCE project members) - Restoring degraded forests due to bark beetles, drought, wind, fire and ash die-back
11:20 - 11:30	Concluding remarks and formulating Key messages from the Workshop by Martina Dodan (CFRI)