# Enhancing Climate Resilience in Forest Management: Recommendations from OptFor-EU

## POLICY BRIEF #2

Forests are vital for climate mitigation and adaptation, yet their management faces numerous challenges due to **institutional gaps, policy fragmentation, and governance inefficiencies**. The OptFor-EU project has identified these challenges and proposed solutions to foster sustainable forest management and enhance resilience across forest-based value chains. This brief summarises the key findings and recommendations to address these pressing issues.

## Key Challenges

The management of forests is hindered by several institutional and governance barriers. **A lack of streamlined institutional frameworks and governance mechanisms** has been identified as a major obstacle to the adoption of climate mitigation strategies in forest management. **Bureaucratic delays and insufficient resources** exacerbate these challenges, with regions such as Spain and Romania facing more pronounced difficulties compared to countries like Austria and Germany, where institutional support is stronger. **Policy fragmentation** further complicates the situation.

While forest-focused policies largely remain under the competence of EU member states, agricultural policies are centralized under the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This division creates **challenges in integrating resilience strategies across sectors.** Financial and knowledge deficits also play a significant role. **Limited financial support** through grants and **insufficient knowledge** on climate change and forest protection are major obstacles.

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Funded by the European Union Horizon Europe programme, under Grant agreement n°101060554. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or CINEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

August 2025

Some institutions **lack transparency** in budgeting and long-term financial sustainability, which undermines their ability to implement effective strategies. The **lack of active involvement of local communities** and other stakeholders in decision-making processes reduces the inclusivity and effectiveness of some of the broader forest management policies.

## Key findings

The OptFor-EU project has made significant progress in understanding the challenges and opportunities in forest management. A **comprehensive policy map** was developed to identify relevant policy domains, documents, and goals related to forest resilience. This map highlights the **connections between EU-level strategies**, such as the Green Deal and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and their implementation at the national level.

Insights from expert surveys revealed that **legislative barriers, organizational obstacles, and a lack of financial support** are perceived as the **most significant challenges** to optimising climate protection in forestry.

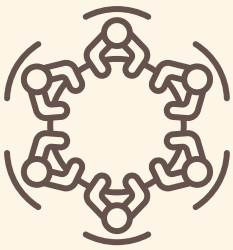
Regional case studies provided **practical examples of successful strategies**, such as Austria's collaborative governance model, which can serve as a blueprint for other regions. These findings underscore the importance of addressing institutional and governance barriers to enhance forest resilience.

## Policy Recommendations

The OptFor-EU project recommends the development of **comprehensive policy frameworks** that integrate climate mitigation and adaptation strategies into national forest management policies. These policies should be regularly updated to reflect new scientific findings and changing environmental conditions.

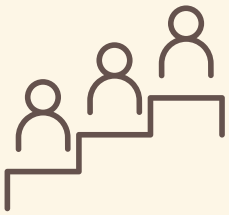
**Streamlining regulations** is also essential to reduce bureaucratic obstacles and ensure coherence in policy implementation.

**Financial support for forest management initiatives** must be increased, with a focus on transparency in budgeting processes and the establishment of long-term financial sustainability mechanisms.



**Stakeholder engagement** should be actively promoted by involving local communities and other stakeholders in policy development and implementation. This will ensure that policies are inclusive and address the diverse needs of all relevant parties.

**Strengthening knowledge and awareness** is another critical area. Investments in dissemination campaigns and training programmes are necessary to improve understanding of climate-smart forestry and resilience strategies.



Finally, **fostering collaboration across governance levels** is crucial. Encouraging cooperation between EU institutions, national governments, and local authorities will help align policy goals and implementation strategies, ensuring a more cohesive approach to forest management.

## Cross-cutting recommendations

### Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies

- Implement effective strategies such as afforestation, carbon sequestration, and species diversification.
- Address trade-offs and synergies in policy implementation.

### Institutional and Governance Factors

- Identify gaps and propose solutions for institutional strengthening.
- Enhance governance mechanisms for policy uptake.

### Financial and Economic Considerations

- Financial and Economic Considerations - Highlight funding needs and long-term financial sustainability.
- Explore the role of carbon markets and incentives.

### Social and Cultural Dimensions

- Promote public awareness and behavioural change.
- Foster community engagement and education.

### Technical and Technological Aspects

- Emphasize the role of innovation, research, and monitoring systems.
- Address gaps in technical skills and resources.

## Conclusions

**Addressing institutional gaps, financial constraints, and stakeholder engagement challenges** is essential to enhance the resilience and sustainability of forest ecosystems.

By implementing the recommendations outlined above, policymakers can foster effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, ensuring the long-term health of forests and their critical role in combating climate change.

The OptFor-EU project provides a roadmap for achieving these goals, offering valuable insights and practical solutions for sustainable forest management.

**For more information,** you can read the report ***'Report on OptFor-EU policy recommendations'*** and stay tuned for the release of ***'Report on risks, barriers, institutional governance'***

**Keywords:** Forest Management, Climate Resilience, Policy Analysis, Governance, Sustainability

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## About the project

**OptFor-EU** aims to co-develop a Decision Support System (DSS) with forest managers and other forest stakeholders, that provides them with suitable climate adaptation and mitigation options for science-based optimising forest ecosystem services (FES) (including decarbonisation) and enhancing forest resilience and its capacities to mitigate climate change (CC) across Europe.

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