



EUFORGEN

EUROPEAN FOREST GENETIC
RESOURCES PROGRAMME

EUFORGEN STEERING COMMITTEE: REPORT OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING

13-15 DECEMBER 2023, ONLINE MEETING



19th Meeting of the EUFORGEN Steering Committee 13-15 December 2023, online

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1. Introduction and approval of the agenda (M. Bozzano, Secretariat)

M. Bozzano opened the meeting and welcomed the participants to the 19th Steering Committee meeting. The online meeting was attended by 23 National Coordinators from Phase VI member countries, a member of the Working group on static and dynamic *ex situ* conservation, and the members of the EUFORGEN Secretariat (full list of participants is available in Annex 1). The designated representative from Luxembourg, Martine Neuberg attended for the first time. The participants presented themselves.

M. Bozzano introduced the agenda (Annex 2) for the meeting, which was approved by the participants. The only amendment required was the review of the decisions taken at the previous meeting, which was added on day 2. It was suggested that a review of decisions is adopted as standard practice for future SC meeting agendas.

David White and Brian Clifford were nominated as rapporteurs.

Decision: The Steering Committee approved the agenda without further changes.

2. Presentation of draft technical and financial report of 2023 (M. Bozzano, Secretariat)

M. Bozzano presented the draft technical and a short overview of the financial report. The draft of the report was uploaded as a background document on the MS Teams workspace in advance of the meeting. The report will be finalized by April 2024, after the closure of the accounts. National Coordinators can still provide comments on the draft; the final document will be part of the background documents and it will be discussed at the next meeting in April 2024. The Steering Committee requested a more detailed financial reporting. During the next meeting, the Steering Committee will indicate the ideal level of detail needed.

Currently, a total of 28 countries signed the membership agreement for Phase VI and negotiations are ongoing with Romania.

M. Bozzano presented the status of the seven major deliverables planned for Phase VI:

1. **Improved Pan-European Strategy for the conservation of FGR** – Fully achieved.
2. **Upgraded EUFGIS Information System, including linking with FOREMATIS and the decision support tool for the management of the genetic conservation unit's network** (ongoing – 2021-2025).

A *Beta* version of the platform was released. M. Bozzano acknowledged the FORGENIUS¹ project that made this possible as the main focus of the project is the upgrade of the EUFGIS information system. The new EUFGIS portal was briefly presented, showing the major functionalities that were implemented. In preparation for the next Steering Committee meeting a webinar will be entirely devoted to the presentation of the new EUFGIS and National Coordinators will have the possibility to give feedback.

The static linking with FOREMATIS has been developed and, in the framework of the OptFORESTS² project, in close collaboration with DG SANTE, the dynamic linking will be developed.

¹ <https://www.forgenius.eu/>

² <https://www.optforests.eu/>

Regarding the EUFGIS Data Sharing Agreement (and agreement between EFI managing the Information System and each country providing the data), only 10 countries have already signed the agreement and National Coordinators were asked to follow up on this and to contact the Secretariat in case of difficulties for the signature of the agreement.

3. **Upgraded website, including monitor of FGR conservation** (partially achieved – ongoing). The species web pages will be finalized during 2024.
4. **Minimum requirements for dynamic and static *ex situ* conservation** (ongoing – draft report) – a presentation was given, and discussions took place (see below)
5. Report on strategies for the adaptation of Genetic Conservation Units to climate change. (ongoing – outline was presented) a Working Group is developing an opinion paper on “Evacuation of threatened material and tracking of movements” – a presentation was given, and discussions took place (see below)
6. **Guidelines for nurseries, seed centres, and policy makers on production and use of FRM** (Dissemination of findings and recommendations of the publication genetic aspects linked to production and use of FRM³). The Steering Committee endorsed at the previous meeting in May 2023, the finalization of all six themes. The package for Theme 5 is available on the website⁴. The materials for the other themes are in preparation and will be finalized by the end of 2024. The package for each theme will include a leaflet, booklet, video, and poster. The short policy brief was finalized and can be downloaded from the website⁵. It was distributed at the Forest Europe event in November 2023. The longer version of the policy document is in preparation and will be finalized early 2024.
7. **Identification of policy, research and forest management needs, related to FGR** (achieved – ongoing). In a previous meeting, the Steering Committee decided to discuss this topic only once the FORGENIUS project would be more advanced.

Highlights of the activities of the Steering Committee during 2023

- 18th SC meeting, 7-9 May 2023, Barcelona, Spain
- OptFORESTS Scoping event, May 2023
- Revision of the Plant and Forest Reproductive Material (FRM) Normative (ongoing)
- 19th SC meeting, 13-15 December, online

H. Kraigher attended the public hearing at the European Parliament in November 2023 on behalf of the EUFORGEN Secretariat and was thanked for her efforts. A document was prepared by the Secretariat, summarising the various views of EUFORGEN Member Countries. The document, titled “View on the Inclusion of Conservation of Forest Genetic Resources (FGR) in the Proposal for an EU regulation on the

³ [Genetic aspects linked to production and use of forest reproductive material \(FRM\): EUFORGEN - European forest genetic resources programme](#)

⁴ [FRM Practice - EUFORGEN European forest genetic resources programme](#)

⁵ [FRM Policy Brief.pdf \(euforgen.org\)](#)

production and marketing of Forest Reproductive Material (FRM)" was uploaded on the EC's "have your say" portal⁶.

An important activity during 2023 was the preparation for Phase VII. The Task Force established at the meeting in May 2023 met several times online. The Task Force developed the draft "Strategic objectives and implementation plan for Phase VII (2025-2029)". Individual activities and related budget will be defined at the meeting of the Steering Committee in April 2024.

Several webinars were given during the year. The list is available in the annual report 2023 and are all accessible through the EUFORGEN YouTube channel⁷. A new webinar is planned for the beginning of 2024 on an emerging threat to *Pinus pinea* genetic diversity.

Update on the Forest Europe Process

The **Draft Bonn Ministerial Decision on "Sustainable Forest Management as a tool to enhance forest resilience"** and the **Draft Bonn Ministerial Declaration "Keeping the concept of SFM fit for the future"** were sent to Signatories as draft zero and will be discussed in Bonn during a devoted Expert Level Meeting in January 2024. In the current draft there is precise reference to EUFORGEN's work; National Coordinators were asked to send feedback to the Secretariat by 20 December 2023.

The Forest Europe Liaison Unit started the collection of data for the development of the **State of Europe's Forest 2024**. As in the previous editions, the EUFORGEN Programme is responsible for collecting the data on **Indicator 4.6. Genetic Resources** and the Secretariat in writing the sub-chapter that describes the situation and trends. The Secretariat will send a message to the National Coordinators, copying the National Focal Points, to request an update and/or different tables. The Secretariat will then compile all and circulate the drafts.

In collaboration with the Forest Europe Forest Risk Knowledge Mechanism, the Secretariat is planning a series of webinars related to genetic resources and their relevance for SFM, in particular related to climate change.

The Forest Europe website gives prominent visibility to the EUFORGEN⁸ programme.

EU Working Parties on Forestry and on Genetic Resources

The Secretariat will follow up with Belgium, the current Presidency of the Council of the European Union, to provide an overview of the recommendation for the European Commission to provide financial support to EUFORGEN and an update on the consequent invitation to the European Commission to become a member of EUFORGEN.

The following decisions were agreed and taken:

a. Revision of the Plant and Forest Reproductive Material (FRM) Normative

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13083-Plant-and-forest-reproductive-material-revised-rules-/F3446389_en

⁷ [Webinars 2023 - YouTube](#)

⁸ <https://foresteurope.org/euforgen/>

The EUFORGEN Programme was asked to express its opinion on the pros and cons of the proposed normative on the Forest Reproductive Material to be a Directive or a Regulation. Due to the need to allow countries to express their views and for the synthesis consolidated through a series of revisions, the Steering Committee indicated that such an analysis could only be developed after March 2024. Should such analysis be still valuable, it will focus on the FGR conservation articles 6 and 18.

Decision:

The Steering Committee agreed to develop an analysis document with pros and cons of a Directive vs a Regulation on the Forest Reproductive Material, focusing on the FGR conservation articles 6 and 18. Due to time limitations, the document will be delivered by the end of the first quarter of 2024.

b. Webinars on topics related to FGR

M. Bozzano encouraged the Steering Committee to suggest possible topics for future webinars. The Steering Committee suggested that the topics should mainly focus on specific EUFORGEN outputs related to conservation issues.

Decision: The SC agreed on providing relevant topics for future webinars. A document will be circulated for a first round of ideas until 15 February 2024.

c. Forest Europe Bonn Ministerial Decision and Declaration Draft

M. Bozzano informed that the Forest Europe Bonn Ministerial Decision and Declaration Draft is available for feedback and asked if the Steering Committee agrees to provide feedback on the Draft by 20 December 2023.

Decision: The SC agreed to provide feedback to the Secretariat on the Forest Europe Bonn Ministerial Decision and Declaration Draft by 20 December 2023.

d. Contribute to the State of Europe's Forest 2024 - Indicator 4.6 Genetic resources

M. Bozzano presented the timeframe to contribute to the State of Europe's Forest 2024 – Indicator 4.6 Genetic resources and proposed the following roadmap:

- January-March 2024 for data collection.
- Secretariat to send to NC and EUFGIS NFP a summary based on the current EUFGIS data for validation.
- EUFGIS NFP to update data in EUFGIS as appropriate.
- NC to confirm data to be reported.
- Secretariat to circulate the draft.

Decision: The SC agreed with the proposed process towards the contribution to the State of Europe's Forest 2024 – Indicator 4.6 Genetic resources.

e. Pan-European Minimum Requirements (Gene Vs Genetic Conservation)

M. Bozzano raised the need to replace the word “gene conservation” with “genetic conservation” and to add the EUFORGEN logo in the Pan-European Minimum Requirements (November 2008), for consistency across the terminology used by EUFORGEN. Also, he suggested the document to be cited

as: “EUFORGEN. Pan-European minimum requirements for dynamic genetic conservation units of forest trees. (2008).”.

Decision: The SC agreed to replace the word “gene conservation” with “genetic conservation” in the Pan-European Minimum Requirements (November 2008) and to add the EUFORGEN logo and the suggested citation to the document.

3. WG Static and dynamic *ex situ* conservation (Jan-Peter George, Luke)

J.P. George presented the progress of the draft report of the Working Group on “dynamic and static *ex situ* conservation” and mentioned the importance and the impact of the physical meeting of the Working Group in July 2023 in Brussels.

The SC noted that the mandate from the Task Force was very clear and the composition of the Working Group was good, which is reflected in the quality of the current draft. The presence of the secretariat in the meetings was appreciated by the WG and assisted the focus of the discussions.

The deadline for the SC to send comments on the draft report is mid-January 2024. After this the Secretariat will implement the feedback on the report and the WG will resume its work.

Decision: The SC agreed to provide comments on the first draft by 15 January 2024.

4. WG developing an opinion paper on “Evacuation of threatened material and tracking of movements” (Anna-Maria Farsakoglou, Secretariat)

A.-M. Farsakoglou gave a presentation on behalf of the Working Group and informed on the outcome of the several interactions which took place during the year. The mandate of the WG was to propose a term that describes “the movement of threatened GCU material from dynamic *in situ* to dynamic *ex situ* conservation” as an alternative to the term “assisted migration” which is frequently misused. The WG has developed a proposed terminology, but the full concept has yet to be finalized.

Discussion

Decision: The SC agreed to provide comments on the proposed terminology and concept by 15 January 2024.

5. EUFORGEN Phase VII preparation (M. Bozzano, Secretariat)

5.1. Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan for EUFORGEN Phase VII

The document “Strategic objectives and *Modus operandi*” that was prepared by the Task Force, nominated at the meeting of the Steering Committee in May 2023, and made available as background document for this meeting, was presented. The operational objectives were already discussed during the meeting in May 2023.

M. Bozzano also presented the draft implementation plan. This document will be further discussed at the next meeting of the Steering Committee in April 2024.

M. Bozzano presented the key points of the draft document for Phase VII. The document will be circulated to the Steering Committee, then reviewed by the Task force, and circulated again to the SC for a second revision. The Task Force will then finalize the draft version for the meeting in April 2024.

Discussion

M. Bozzano elaborated on how countries can become a EUFORGEN member. He stated that all the signatory countries of the Forest Europe process will be invited and if the Steering Committee deems so, the invitation can be expanded to other countries from the southern part of the Mediterranean and central Asia.

The difference between the term “Contact Person” and “National Coordinator” was explained; the contact person is the person to approach when a country is not yet member of the EUFORGEN Programme and is the liaising person during the signatory process. Once the Letter of Agreement has been signed, then the country will be asked to nominate the National Coordinator. For non-member countries, the contact person is the person responsible to identify and nominate the EUFGIS National Focal Point. For countries that are a member of EUFORGEN during the previous Phase, there will be no need to ask the nomination of a Contact Person, since the nominated National Coordinator will serve for this purpose.

Discussion on the role of the secretariat in project proposals

The EUFORGEN Secretariat was involved in several recent research projects related to FGR. The Steering Committee expressed the need to define the modalities for the Secretariat to be involved in research projects. While it was noted that disclosure of project proposals may be a problem due to confidentiality, a pragmatic approach will be needed, and clear guidelines should be established.

The Steering Committee decided that a standard message will be prepared as a reply to the request from any potential consortium informing that there is the need to consult the Steering Committee. It should be made clear what are the elements on which the Steering Committee will take decisions, on related activities, etc. the Secretariat will provide a template to be filled in by the consortium (to be prepared as annex to the Phase VII). The filled-in template will then be shared with the Steering Committee that will compare against other or (in case of no alternatives) evaluate based on the provided elements and their fulfilment of EUFORGEN’s objectives.

Assessment of EUFORGEN

The discussion of carrying out an evaluation of EUFORGEN was initiated at the meeting in May 2023. The review will be done during Phase VII to assess the activities carried out during the past phases. Part of the review will be the Forest Genetic Resources Strategy for Europe. An offer has been received from an external contractor, but due to a high cost the Secretariat did not suggest to accept it. The Steering Committee will discuss the modalities to run the review of the Programme during the next meeting in April 2024 and make a decision on how to proceed.

Conclusion

The Steering Committee was asked to provide feedback on the draft document. In case of many comments on parts for the draft, they can be discussed separately from the rest of the document. Changes and modifications can be further discussed during the meeting in April 2024.

Decision: The SC agreed to provide comments on the first draft by the 22 January 2024, then until the 5 February to comment on each other's ideas. After that the Task Force will meet again to implement the feedback

Decision: The guiding principles for the Secretariat to participate in project proposals will be modified and it will include the modality for the approval of the SC and a checklist that will be drafted by the TF and approved by the SC at the next SC meeting.

5.2. Annual contributions and budget

Introduction

The tables for the draft budget and the expected annual contributions were provided. A combined draft document will be prepared for the meeting in April 2024. M. Bozzano explained the calculation of the country contributions were defined based on the UN rates as in the past. A threshold was prepared for the different categories and an increase of 3% per year was applied for the whole phase to cope with inflation.

The SC identified the presented proposal as the most appropriate.

The preparation of the budget and the contributions was done in parallel. The estimated budget cost categories were maintained as pre budget for Phase VI, but a different breakdown of the budget can be defined. This will be further discussed at the meeting in April 2024.

The budget for Phase VI included external funding. For the budget of Phase VII the external funding will be indicated on a separate table. The staff costs for the budget for Phase VII were calculated based on the costs for 2023 applying a 2% increase.

The budget will be finalized at the meeting in April 2024, when the resources needed for each operational objective and activities will also be defined. The budget presented is an estimate of the resources to be allocated. However, this draft budget can be useful for National Coordinators to have preliminary clearance, in case needed.

Discussion

The National Coordinator for Italy informed that the possibility to accept the increase in funding will be explored, and in case this will be difficult, a cap could be discussed at the next meeting in April 2024.

The National Coordinator for Spain informed that the signature of the letter of agreement for the membership may remain a concern also during Phase VII.

The table for the country contributions presented will be part of the document for discussion at the next meeting of the Steering Committee. The secretariat will finalize the document and send it to the National Coordinators. The document will be finalized at the Steering Committee meeting in April 2024.

Decision: The SC agreed that the Secretariat will include the contributions and budget proposal into the current draft of the Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan for EUFORGEN Phase VII. The final contributions and budget will be defined during the next SC Meeting.

6. Nineteenth EUFORGEN SC meeting – Decisions and final approval

The draft decisions were presented and further discussed for approval. The decisions are reported under the relevant paragraphs of this document (see above).

Decision: The SC approved the decisions of the meeting.

7. Any other business

Decision: The SC agreed that decisions of the previous meeting will be checked in the next SC meeting.

8. Closure of the meeting

M. Bozzano closed the meeting and thanked the participants for attending.

Annex 1 – List of Participants



**19th meeting of the EUFORGEN Steering Committee
13-15 December 2023, online meeting
List of participants**

EUFORGEN National Coordinators

Heino Konrad

Federal Research and Training Centre for
Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape
Austria

Alain Servais

Public Service of Wallonia
Belgium

Mladen Ivankovic

Croatian Forest Research Institute
Croatia

Tiit Maaten

Institute of Forestry and Rural Engineering
Estonian University of Life Sciences
Estonia

Mari Rusanen

Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)
Finland

François Lefèvre

INRAE - Ecologie des Forêts
Méditerranéennes
France

Bernd Degen

Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute
Germany

László Nagy

Forest Research Institute, University of
Sopron
Hungary

Adalsteinn Sigurgeirsson

Icelandic Forest Service
Iceland

Brian Clifford

Department of Agriculture, Food and the
Marine (DAFM)
Ireland

Maurizio Sabatti

University of Tuscia
Innovation in biological systems, food and
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Darius Kavaliauskas

Vytautas Magnus University Agriculture
Academy - Lithuanian Forest Research
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Martine Neuberg

Administration de la nature et des forêts
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Tor Myking

Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research
Norway

Marcin Beza

The Kostrzyca Forest Gene Bank
State Forests National Forest Holding
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Felipe Pérez Martín

Ministry of Ecological Transition and the
Demographic Challenge (MITECO)
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Andreas Rudow

Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH)
Institute of Terrestrial Ecosystems
Switzerland

Sviltana Los

Ukrainian Research Institute of Forestry &
Forest Melioration (URIFFM)
Ukraine

David White

Forestry Commission
United Kingdom

Observers

Jan-Peter George
Luke
Finland

EUFORGEN Secretariat

European Forest Institute (EFI), Barcelona
Office
Sarah Adams
Michele Bozzano
Anna-Maria Farsakoglou
Lidwina Koop

Unable to attend

Josef Frýdl

Forestry and Game Management Research
Institute (FGMRI)
Czech Republic

Ditte Christina Olrik

Ministry of Environment and Food of Denmark,
Nature Agency
Denmark

Darrin T. Stevens

Environment and Resources Authority
Malta

Mirjana Šijačić-Nikolić

Faculty of Forestry, Belgrade
Serbia

Annex 2 – Agenda


19th EUFORGEN Steering Committee (SC) Meeting
European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN)
 13-15 December 2023 – Online meeting
DRAFT AGENDA



Wednesday 13 December

Time	Session	Purpose Outcome	Background documents
Session 1 – Reporting 2023 Moderator: Sarah Adams			
10:00 – 10:15	Opening of the meeting Round table – introduction and approval of the agenda. Nomination of rapporteurs	For discussion and decision Approval of the agenda	List of participants Agenda of the meeting
10:15 - 10:45	Presentation of draft technical and financial reports 2023 (<i>Michele Bozzano</i>)	For information and discussion The SC received the drafts of the technical and financial reports 2023	Draft technical and Financial Report 2023 Pages 1-26 OptFORESTS Scoping event report (May 2023)
10:45 – 11:15	Update on the implementation plan - (<i>M Bozzano</i>)	For information and discussion The SC is informed about EUFORGEN updates on ongoing activities	Draft technical and Financial Report 2023 Pages 27-37
11:15 – 11:30	Break		
11:30 – 12:15	WG Static and dynamic <i>ex situ</i> conservation (<i>Jan-Peter George, Luke</i>)	For information, discussion, and feedback The SC is informed on the progress of the WG on static and dynamic <i>ex situ</i> conservation and discusses on the draft	Draft report on dynamic and static <i>ex situ</i> conservation
12:15 – 12:45	WG developing an opinion paper on “Evacuation of threatened material and tracking of movements” (<i>Anna-Maria Farsakoglou</i>)	For information, discussion (and feedback) The SC decides on the next steps proposed by the EUFORGEN Secretariat	Draft outline of the Opinion paper
12:45 – 13:00	Wrap-up of first day (<i>M.Bozzano/ Sarah Adams</i>)		

Thursday 14 December

Time	Session	Purpose Outcome	Background documents
Session 2 – EUFORGEN Phase VII planning Moderator: Sarah Adams			
10:00 – 11:15	EUFORGEN Phase VII Preparation Presentation of the draft “Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan for EUFORGEN Phase VII” (M. Bozzano)	<i>For information and discussion</i>	 The Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan Phase VII
11:15 – 11:30	Break		
11:30 – 12:45	EUFORGEN Phase VII Preparation continued	<i>For discussion and decision</i> The SC approves the relevant parts of the proposal and formulate alternatives, as appropriate.	
	EUFORGEN Phase VII Preparation Definition of chapters that need improvement	<i>For discussion and decision</i>	
12:45 - 13:00	Wrap-up of second day (M.Bozzano Sarah Adams)		

Friday 15 December

Time	Session	Purpose Outcome	Background documents
Session 3 – EUFORGEN Phase VII preparation Moderator: Anna-Maria Farsakoglou			
10:00 – 11:00	EUFORGEN Phase VII Preparation – annual contributions and budget	<i>For information and discussion</i> The SC discusses the principles for the development of the budget and for the national contributions	<i><u>Budget Contributions Excel file</u></i> Draft table of annual contributions and proposed budget
11:00 – 11:15	Coffee Break		
11:15 – 12:15		<i>For discussion and decision</i> The SC defines the principles for the development of the budget and for the national contributions	
12:15 – 12:45	19th EUFORGEN SC Meeting: Decisions final approval	<i>For discussion and approval</i> The SC discusses on the outcomes of the meeting and approve the decisions of each session	To be developed during the meeting
12:45 – 13:00	Wrap up – Meeting Feedback	<i>For discussion and decision</i>	

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