

# THE LULUCF REGULATION & FOREST MONITORING

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**Contact:**

Julia Bogнар, Krystyna Springer (IEEP)



**ABOUT:** The EU has set targets to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and to reach climate neutrality by 2050 to keep global temperature increase below 1.5°C. Europe's land is vital to achieving this goal. Under the Land Use and Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) Regulation, the land use and land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector is required to increase the net carbon sink, with a target of storing an additional 310 MtCO<sub>2</sub>eq by 2030. Under this target, forests are expected to make the largest contribution and it will be impossible for the EU to meet the LULUCF land sink target without strong efforts to protect existing forest stocks and a significant scaling up of reforestation, afforestation, and agroforestry.

Reforestation and protection of existing carbon stocks will be central in efforts to mitigate climate change as these will reduce and avoid emissions from land, enhance the capacity of ecosystems to capture and sequester carbon in natural sinks, and can prevent future emissions by increasing ecosystem resilience.

The forestry sector is currently the only sector which removes CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere (both forests and harvested wood products). This sink is dominated by CO<sub>2</sub> absorbed from existing and new forests. While forests are a net sink, the sector also is a source of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Forests are the largest source of LULUCF sector emissions, largely from conversion of forests to other land uses.

With the sink target, if a Member State converts forests to other land uses, it must compensate for the resulting emissions. This could be accomplished by planting new forests (afforestation), improving sustainable management of existing forests, or by using flexibilities with the Effort Sharing Regulation (agreeing to trade removals with other Member States or by using net removals banked from the first accounting period to the second period).

## MONITORING AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The proposed updates to the LULUCF Regulation simplify rules for monitoring, reporting and verification of emissions and removals, using more accurate and precise data monitoring.

The proposed updates to the LULUCF Regulation reinforce the obligation for Member States to submit integrated mitigation plans for the land sector in their National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and enhance monitoring requirements using digital technologies. The sink target of 310 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent has been distributed between Member States and will be translated into annual national targets for the period from 2026 to 2030, based on the averages for emissions and removals reported in the greenhouse gas inventories and the areas of managed land for each Member State during the years 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Secondary legislation will set out detailed rules related to monitoring and reporting of emissions and verification of compliance reports. This will require upgraded and enhanced provision of

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monitoring using the European Environment Agency (EEA) and related data services under the Copernicus programme. Information obtained from Member States may be complemented by systematic atmospheric observations through in situ as well as remote sensing observations, such as those provided by Copernicus.

Member States are being encouraged to consolidate reporting with other relevant policy areas and to integrate inventories of GHG emissions with relevant electronic databases and geographic information systems.

### HOW CAN THE FOREST MONITORING FRAMEWORK PLAY A ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE LULUCF TARGET?

Measuring changes to forests in a timely manner is necessary in understanding forest policy effectiveness and driving progress towards the LULUCF sink target. Forest measurements through remote sensing technologies can provide objective, transparent, and timely information. Without real-time data, efforts to increase the carbon storage capacity of forests may not meet the expectations of policy makers.

At the moment, policymakers have insufficient data to assess Europe's forests. Centralized information is only updated every 3 years, and often with delays. The Forest Monitoring Framework and Strategic Plans aims to develop an EU-wide observation framework that will provide **regular** and **timely** information on the status of forests. Such timely information will be necessary for Member States to demonstrate compliance with the targets established under the LULUCF Regulation.



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