

COFO 28 – statements of the EU and its Member States

Agenda item 4. State of the World's Forests 2026: Restoring forests and landscapes — the way forward for a sustainable future

1. Madam / Mr. Chair, Excellencies, distinguished delegates and representatives, Ireland is honoured to speak on behalf of the EU and its 27 Member States.
2. We welcome the State of the World's Forests (SOFO) report 2026 and its focus on restoring forests and landscapes as a way forward for a sustainable future.
3. The latest Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA 2025) confirms that, while the annual rate of deforestation has continued to decline, globally, efforts are still required to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030. This must galvanise, not slow, our collective action.
4. Restoration should go hand in hand with efforts to halt and reverse deforestation and forest degradation by 2030, including by addressing the underlying drivers. Conserving and sustainably managing existing forests, and in particular primary and old-growth forests, must complement the restoration of degraded forests and landscapes.
5. We recall the global ambition to bring degraded land into restoration and the momentum of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration to scale up action and monitoring.
6. Restoration approaches must be science-based and adapted both to local and future climate and ecological conditions — favouring genetically and functionally diverse, and where appropriate, mixed-species forests that avoid maladaptive practices which undermine the multifunctionality of forests.
7. We support the actions proposed in the background document and recommend that FAO continue to facilitate knowledge exchange, innovation, and policy dialogue. FAO members should, upon request and subject to available resources, be supported in restoration planning, monitoring, and access to finance.
8. We commend FAO's co-leadership, with UNEP, of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and support building on its achievements in implementing the UN Decade for Afforestation and Reforestation (2027-2036) in line with Sustainable Forest Management. The EU has ambitious targets which support these policy objectives. The EU's Nature Restoration Regulation as a legally binding instrument aims to implement measures to restore at least 20% of the EU's ecosystems by 2030.
9. Afforestation and reforestation must follow forest and landscape restoration principles – recalling the principles as established by the Global Partnership on Forest and Landscape Restoration (GPFLR) - the right tree in the right place, for the right purpose. They should be embedded in integrated landscape approaches, avoid unintended shifts towards large-scale monoculture plantations, and prioritise diverse, locally adapted, or endemic species that can deliver multiple ecological and socioeconomic benefits. This is particularly important given that FAO estimates the need for additional productive plantations by 2050 to meet the significant projected increase in global wood demand.

10. Finally, restoration must be inclusive and rights-based, delivering benefits for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, smallholders, women, and youth, safeguarding land and forest tenure rights.
11. Thank you, Madam / Mr. Chair.