



BOOKLET

EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE
TRANSFER FROM RESEARCH AND
PRACTICE TO POLICY MAKERS

European innovation partnership
network promoting operational groups
dedicated to forestry and agroforestry

Booklet

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01.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge transfer from research to policy involves research, selection of findings that are relevant for policymakers, and their actual use in policymaking, or by media and the general public. This process is far from linear and challenges researchers to navigate the fine line between “scientifically robust research” and provision of “serviceable truth”.¹

The FOREST4EU project – European innovation partnership network promoting operational groups dedicated to forestry and agroforestry – implemented knowledge transfer within the frame of its policy learning and capacity building activities. Knowledge transfer that embeds research and policymaking in communities of practice directs attention to bottom-up processes, seeks to involve the experience of those that policies are (or should be) targeting, and explores ways of building shared understandings.

The present booklet offers five good practice examples for knowledge transfer from research and practice to policymakers. They describe how researchers, policymakers and practitioners were brought together to foster dialogue and mutual learning across regions, countries and levels of governance. Benchmarking criteria and indicators are applied to evaluate the knowledge transfer in FOREST4EU, seeking to arrive at more general lessons learned for applied research in the management and governance of land use, resilience and social wellbeing.

Key dimensions for effective knowledge transfer are: start early, know the players, rules, policies, and institutions; share knowledge and promote knowledge sharing, use different formats, and stay committed to real life problems in local settings.

Enjoy reading!



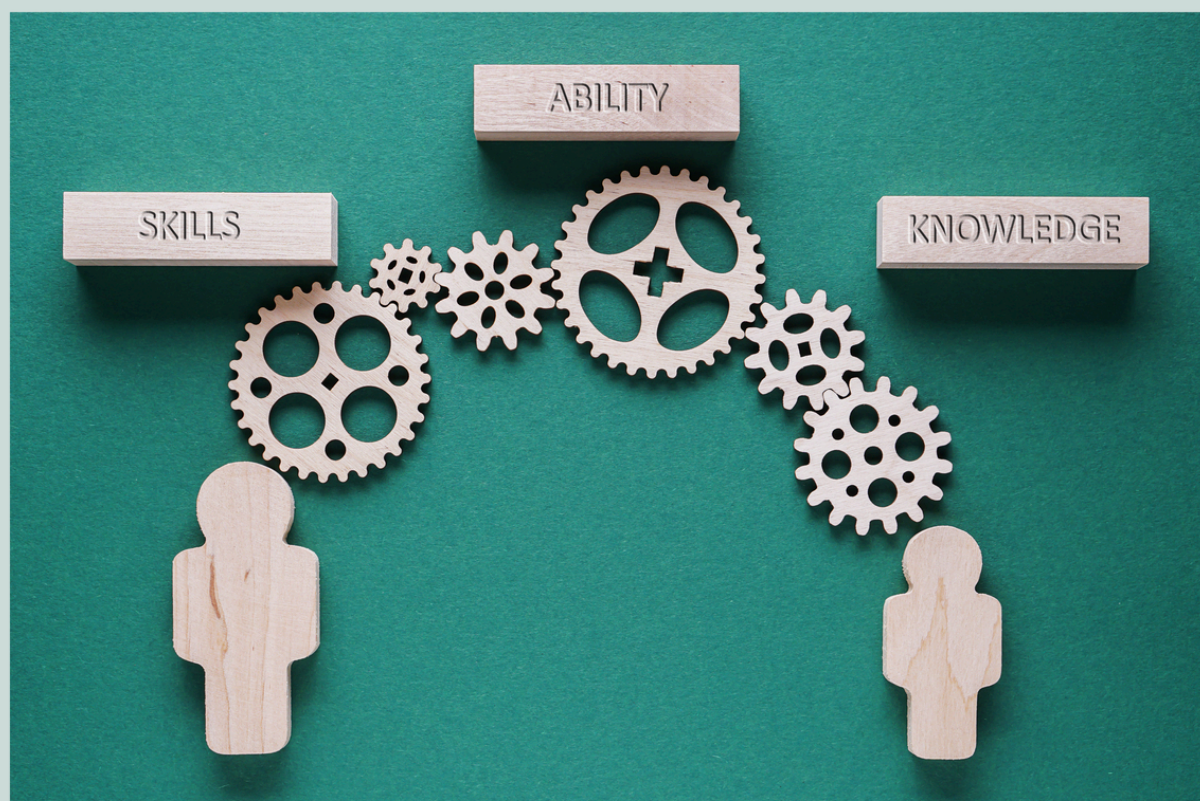
¹ Sheila Jasanoff (1990): The fifth branch: Science advisers as policymakers, Harvard University Press; Michael Böcher & Max Krott (2016): Science makes the world go round. Springer

02.

BENCHMARKS FOR EFFECTIVE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM INNOVATION RESEARCH AND PRACTICE TO POLICY

Benchmarks for effective knowledge transfer from innovation research and practice include criteria and indicators. A useful framework is provided by Ashcraft and colleagues (2020).² Their “Model for Dissemination of Research” is based on a comprehensive literature review and reveals which criteria are essential for translating lessons learned from research to policymakers and ensure meaningful discussion.

The benchmarking accounts for the salience of knowledge transfer from innovation practice to policy by emphasizing process, actors and context criteria. They include: “start early”, “know the players and the policy process”, “involve evidence champions and brokers”, “context matters” and “make research products timely, relevant and accessible”.



² Ashcraft, Laura Ellen, Deirdre Quinn, Ross C. Brownson (2020): Strategies for effective dissemination of research to United States policymakers: a systematic review. Implementation Science 15 (89), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-020-01046-3>

Table 1. Benchmarks for knowledge transfer to policy. Source: Adapted from Ashcroft (2020: 10ff.)

Criteria	Description	Indicators
Start early	Early and ongoing engagement with policymakers is important to maximize interest and applicability	Number of contacts with policymakers before project starts
Know the players and the policy process	Get to know and build relationships with the target audience in policy field; policymakers are experts in their field and tend to look for research that promotes their interests; create awareness of ideological beliefs	Number of contacts with policymakers and their staff; participation in workshops, networking events and consultations
Involve evidence champions and brokers	Evidence champions and brokers are intermediary players, connecting research suppliers and those in demand; can play a role in connecting policymakers with researchers and conceptualizing or developing policy	Number of meetings with intermediary organizations and/or players
Context matters	Salience of research depends on contexts, incl. specific policy audiences, relevant institutions, local settings and broader sociopolitical frameworks	Percentage of research outputs tailored to specific policy needs and local settings
Make research products timely, relevant, and accessible	Timeliness and relevance are paramount for research; complexity of analysis and methodology must be reduced to gain attention in target audience	Number and accessibility of formats incl. briefs, talking points and videos; clear and precise language for communication of research results; number of targeted policy topics

Researchers can act in different ways. When presenting research findings as simple facts rather than making specific recommendations for actions, they can help accommodate conflict between different groups in a policy field and gain credibility across party politics and ideological beliefs.

03.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER FROM INNOVATION PRACTICE TO POLICY IN FOREST4EU

Good practice example 1: Policy Focus Groups connecting neighboring regions and countries

The FOREST4EU project recognized the diverse challenges and opportunities facing European forests and agroforestry. To address regional specificities, three Policy Focus Groups (PFGs) have been established, covering Central Europe, South-East Europe, and South-West Europe. These groups bridged the gap between policy and research on innovation in forestry and agroforestry, examining regional patterns of forest management (including multipurpose forestry and ecosystem management) and the uptake of funding measures in the frame of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The Policy Focus Groups created awareness of EIP-Agri Operational Groups and facilitated lesson-learning on supportive policies and frameworks. Each of the PFGs met three times throughout 2024. The sessions were scheduled for two to three hours. In total, there were 184 participants at the nine PFG meetings, representing government authorities, forest owners and companies, research, and advisory and support organizations. Their commitment was highly appreciated. Continuous communication within groups and reporting across groups was done to sustain PFG members' motivation and show results of the group work.

PFG participants provided feedback on survey results regarding barriers for developing innovations, and identification of similar challenges and opportunities across different countries. For example, forestry innovations do not deliver direct profits. The exclusion of forestry and agroforestry from rural funding streams in some countries presents a significant obstacle. Government action to rectify the lack of pre-financing and to provide horizons for long-term planning in, for example, roadmaps for regional development are crucial to invest in innovation.

The group meetings also offered opportunities for presentations of group members on EIP-Agri implementation, other support measures for innovation in forestry and agroforestry and peer-to-peer learning. For example, the Bavarian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry shared how it started the uptake of EIP-Agri for forestry in the PFG for South-East Europe. The PFG for South-West Europe implemented breakout sessions to discuss how the local solutions of OGs could be upscaled at national level and found that living labs, lighthouse farms, and demonstration sites are valuable tools.

Other pathways for innovation, like the Austrian project “ForForestInnovation” or the Future Forest Initiative in Germany’s Harz region, were presented in the PFG for Central Europe. The interactive design and multi-stakeholder approach of the PFGs were useful to extract potential solutions and recommendations for EU policy makers.

Market-driven solutions should focus on targeted investments and R&D for innovative tools, empowering forest managers. Emerging markets for ecosystem services offer promising opportunities for innovation. Crucially, enhancing the adaptability of forestry institutions and cooperation across the forest-based value chain are vital.



Figure 1. Policy Focus Groups' general report

Good practice example 2: Knowledge transfer workshops in targeted regions

FOREST4EU implemented a series of knowledge transfer workshops to facilitate the uptake of Operational Groups (OGs) in forestry and agroforestry in member states with limited or no prior experience. The workshops served as platforms for engaging policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to discuss the implementation of EIP-Agri in forestry and agroforestry, identify administrative and policy barriers, and explore solutions to enhance their uptake. They were conducted between November 2024 and January 2025 in Croatia, Finland and Germany, both as online and in-presence events with approximately 20 participants in each country.

The knowledge transfer workshops were built on the idea that the interactive and multi-stakeholder-driven innovation approach of EIP-Agri may face challenges related to awareness, capacity building, and policy alignment.

Effective knowledge transfer is essential for successful adoption in Member States with limited or no experience in implementing OGs as innovation measures.

Accordingly, policymakers and administrators, both at national and regional level, advisors for forestry and farming, OG innovators, forest owners, and interest groups were the primary target groups.

Table 2. Selected OGs from FOREST4EU database

	Croatia	Finland	Germany
Inno 1.	UAV to map growing stock volume for sharing forest management plan	Technique for superficial heat treatment on wood product	Standardization of available forest data: the first step to support wood mobilization in Friuli Venezia Giulia
Inno 2.	UAV and multispectral camera to map stressed forest area	The "sustainable bee forest" concept and implementation	Course on GIS and Remote Sensing Data to monitor forest ecosystems
Inno 3.	Technology at the service of forest renewal - mapping with drone and GPS to stake out the stand	Developing a Novel Martelloscope for Assessing Biodiversity and Growing Stock Volume with the Aid of a Digital Twin	Keys for Forest Types Classification Schemes to support the reporting of Sustainable Forest Management Indicators in Various Contexts
Inno 4.	Establishing new business models with NWFP (Bienwald)	Mobile kiln prototype for local biochar production	Biological treatment of chestnut cancer
Inno 5.	Criteria and indicators for PEFC certification of sustainable management of agroforestry	New cultivation methods of highly productive apples adapted to northern climates	"Agroforestry in Austria" network

To speed up the uptake of EIP-Agri funding for innovation in forestry and agroforestry, the knowledge transfer workshops organized a structured exchange where successful OGs and project partners presented their experiences, highlighting effective innovation measures and implementation strategies. The focus was on five OGs that had been preselected in the given countries, which ensured their relevance for national and regional contexts and rural development goals.

Success stories from countries where OGs are well-established, and policy and administrative barriers are addressed, were presented to help avoid common traps and mistakes and tailor innovation strategies to rural development contexts. Attention also went to explaining the comprehensive data base of FOREST4EU and other knowledge repositories (e.g. EU Farmbook) with access to the broad range of the capacity-building material that was developed in the project. Beyond that, the in-presence workshop in Germany offered the opportunity to engage in a joint network analysis for the planning of innovation projects.

The workshops highlighted the importance of aligning forestry funding mechanisms with broader rural development and agricultural policies in each country to enhance support for innovation in the sector. Participants recognized the need for strategic updates to national policy frameworks to better integrate forestry and agroforestry initiatives and emphasized the value of engaging in knowledge-sharing networks to address challenges and drive policy improvements.

A shared commitment emerged to modernize approaches in forestry, encourage regulatory reforms, and strengthen financial and policy support for innovation. Participants agreed on the necessity to prepare upcoming funding opportunities, reinforce multi-stakeholder collaboration, and advocate for stronger representation of forestry and agroforestry in national and international strategic plans.

FOREST4EU Knowledge Transfer Workshop: Program and Timetable

New and innovative cultivation methods of highly productive apples adapted to northern climates in Umea, Sweden

Mr Andreas Sundberg, Brannland Iscider

Sustainable Bee Forest concept and its implementation in Hesse, Germany

Mr. Roland Felt, Forstbetriebsgemeinschaft (FBG)

Diversification of edible wild mushroom cultivation with new native species in Spain

Director Carles Diaz, Cooperative Bolet Ben Fet - Teb Verd

Prefabricated modular construction system made from Normandy hardwoods in France

Mr. Pierre Gautier, Architect, Batimen Bois de Normandie

Digital marteloscope: a technical and educational tool for smart forestry management in central Italy (BIOSEIFORTE)

Mr. Mattia Balestra & Prof. Carlo Urbinati, Università Politecnica delle Marche

Good practice example 3: Forest Innovation Workshop in Brussels with multiple stakeholders and sister projects

The 6th Edition of the European Forest Innovation Workshop was jointly organised by the Horizon Europe projects FOREST4EU and OptForEU (Smart decisions for sustainable forest management). It took place on February 11-12, 2025, at the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria to the European Union in Brussels. The event offered an important occasion for discussing the needs and challenges related to innovation in the forestry sector from regional, national and European perspectives.

With more than 220 registrations and 150 participants, including 13 research projects and 14 Operational Groups, all dealing with forest topics, the Forest Innovation Workshop sent a strong signal to interested groups and policymakers: There has not been such a large meeting of researchers, practitioners and regional administration to discuss forest innovation in Brussels before.

The event was co-organized by the European Forest Institute (EFI) and its Bioregions Facility, the ERIAFF network (European Regions for Innovation in Agriculture, Food and Forestry), the European Confederation of Forest Owners (CEPF), the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR), the European Farmers and Agri Cooperatives (COPA-COGECA), the European Landowners' Organization (ELO) and Euromontana, the Representation of the Free State of Bavaria and the Region of Tuscany.

Over the course of the two-day event, participants had the opportunity to engage with policymakers, forest owners, practitioners, researchers, associations, and NGOs. Together, they explored the latest innovations, exchanged views on regional priorities, and fostered collaboration within the forest-based sector. Discussions focused on the current state of innovation in the European forestry framework, as well as practical and scientific insights related to the "Forests of the Future" and the broader innovation agenda.

The event also featured parallel sessions showcasing insights from ongoing Horizon Europe research projects and innovative practices from EIP Agri OGs in forestry and agroforestry. A roundtable discussion with regional authorities on the key priorities and supportive frameworks needed to drive future innovation and a representative of the European Commission facilitated lesson-learning from regional contexts for innovation policies in the CAP.

Francesca Gianetti (FOREST4EU project coordinator) emphasized in her concluding speech that the 6th Forest Innovation Workshop created a fertile environment for exchanging ideas and discussing the challenges and future opportunities for innovation in the forestry and agroforestry sectors. Innovation in these sectors arises from social processes and needs effective communication and dissemination approaches, like peer-to-peer exchange. Innovation also requires time, perseverance, and collective efforts.

The 6th Forest Innovation Workshop was cost-free, held in English and an in-presence only event. All information on the agenda and presentations is available on the event webpage <https://forestinnovation.eu/>



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Figures 3, 4, 5. Pictures from forestinnovation.eu website

Good practice example 4: International study visits with practitioners to local settings

FOREST4EU organized five international study visits between April and June 2025:

- 1. ITHub 1 study visit in Slovenia, focusing on wood mobilization, private forest ownership, and sustainable forest planning and management
- 2. ITHub 2 study visit in France, focusing on adaptive silvicultural practices, mitigation strategies, and carbon farming in forestry
- 3. ITHub 3 study visit in Italy, focusing on ecosystem services and sustainable forest management
- 4. ITHub 4 study visit in Spain, focusing on non-wood forest products
- 5. ITHub 5 study visit in Portugal, focusing on sustainable management in agroforestry

The study visits were announced with a call for application, which was published on the project’s website, via social media and national networks. Candidates were then selected based on the following criteria: motivation, capacity to act as multiplier, organizational/institutional affiliation, proficiency in English, travel costs, age, and gender.

At each study visit at least 20 stakeholders participated, nine of which were from the nine project partner countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Latvia, Slovenia, and Finland). In some cases, additional participants joined (with own funding).

Table 3. Participation at international study visit

	ITHub 1	ITHub 2	ITHub 3	ITHub 4	ITHub 5
No of participants	22	36	25	20	29
No of nationalities	11	8	9	9	9
No of OGs visited	4	4	1	2	4

The 3-day study visits aimed at connecting experts, fostering dialogue among stakeholders and cross-border collaboration, and strengthening the understanding of how innovations can contribute to the sustainable development of European forestry. There was project funding available to reimburse the travel expenses of approx. 2 participants per partner country.

The study visits included field visits, round tables, breakout sessions, and panel discussions in local settings. Participants met with practitioners and professionals in forestry and agroforestry in the given countries. Across all visits, Mediterranean OGs demonstrated how experimentation, collaboration, and knowledge exchange are building adaptive, resilient forestry and agroforestry systems.

Round tables, for example, offered fruitful opportunities to discuss the outcomes of the practice-based innovation projects and to distill some more general lessons from the local settings where these OGs are based, whereas the field visits were building bridges between theory and practice.

Participants expressed high levels of satisfaction and stated they would recommend participation in an international study visit to their peers, highlighting the value of knowledge exchange, exposure to practical innovations, and opportunities for future collaboration across countries and sectors. The cross-border cooperation and international dialogue, often facilitated through OG participation, were deemed vital for strengthening resilience and promoting innovation across Europe's diverse ecological, economic, and policy landscapes.

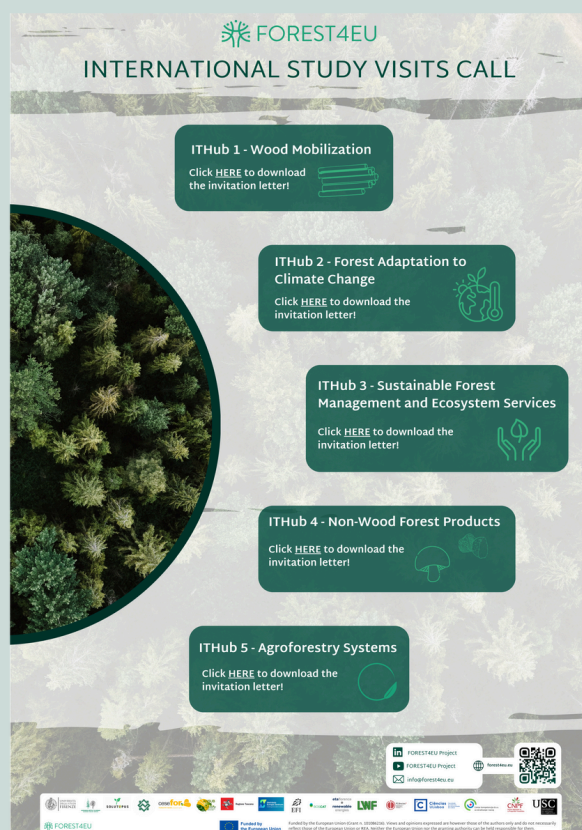


Figure 6. Call form for study visits



Figure 6, 7, 8, 9. Pictures from the different study visits (6: Spain; 7: Italy; 8: Slovenia; 9: France)

Good practice example 5: Policy briefs on specific and transversal topics

At the end of the project six policy briefs were created, emerging from the five ITHubs in FOREST4EU and one transversal topic that cuts across the five ITHubs in the project. The policy briefs share the same structure, covering four themes: Relevance of innovations for the Hubs, key actors, policy implications and conclusions. The transversal policy brief directs attention to the EIP-Agri funding scheme and its suitability for innovation in forestry and agroforestry. The policy briefs cover 2-4 pages, summarize lessons learned throughout project implementation and include infographics to support the communication of key insights.

The different policy briefs were elaborated in close cooperation with the ITHub leaders, the project coordinator and WP leaders. Several meetings, including a policy workshop at the 2nd project meeting in January 2025 and three online

workshops were held to facilitate the writing process of the policy briefs. In addition, frequent email conversations took place to resolve issues and revise the policy drafts. Project partners decided to target EU policies relevant for forestry and agroforestry more generally to allow for a broader uptake of the briefs and disseminate them also beyond the project duration.

The policy briefs are available via the project's website and disseminated via social media, at events of sister projects, the final FOREST4EU conference in November 2025, and personal emails to members of the European Parliament in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, policy officers in the European Commission, and representatives of interest groups and associations. Beyond that, project partners are encouraged to disseminate the briefs via their networks and the national networks for rural development.



Figure 10.
Policy Briefs
LinkedIn cards

04.

FROM INNOVATION PRACTICE TO POLICY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM FOREST4EU

There is a mutual relationship between applied research and policymaking. Wicked problems and complex settings call for sound evidence in policymaking, whereas researchers might be interested and/or expected to communicate their insights to a broader audience and make a difference in decisions on topical issues that concern them. Policymakers often use networks and personal, informal contacts, oral forms of communication, to connect data to beliefs and emotions to interpretations. Research uptake depends on its relevance in a given political context, and the accessibility and legitimacy of the knowledge producers. In FOREST4EU, we stressed the bottom-up approach for research uptake by policymakers and other interested groups.

In FOREST4EU, we stressed the bottom-up approach for research uptake by policymakers and other interested groups. We did so for three reasons:

- FOREST4EU promotes the hundreds of practice- and practitioner-based Operational Groups that advance innovation and good practices in forestry and agroforestry
- OG results struggle in crossing national borders; implemented innovations tend to remain at local level
- Limited awareness among policymakers at regional, national and European level why innovation matters in forestry and agroforestry and which framework conditions support them

Success criteria for effective knowledge transfer from research to policymakers include actors, processes, and context factors.

FOREST4EU invented new formats and used existing ones to start early for the dialogue with OG innovators, policymakers and interested groups when it set up macro-regional policy focus groups and prepare for the knowledge transfer workshops in individual countries. The numerous meetings with the Policy Focus Groups were essential to become aware of national and regional perspectives on CAP and forest-related EU policies and to know the policy process.

The high-level Forest Innovation Workshop in Brussels was a unique opportunity to involve evidence champions and brokers. With 13 projects and several interest groups as co-organizers, invited OG representatives as experts for innovation in forestry and agroforestry, and a committed audience, research suppliers and those in demand were clearly connected.

Eventually, both political and local contexts matter for research uptake and thriving innovation in rural areas. 132 people from farming and forestry, research, administration and interest groups joined the 5 international study visits to learn from practitioners about innovation and discuss opportunities for scaling in local settings. ITHub leaders in FOREST4EU distilled the lessons learned from these visits and communicated their key messages in the policy briefs. Overall, a joint spirit and commitment to make research products timely, relevant, and accessible is the backbone of FOREST4EU.

Table 4. Benchmarking of knowledge transfer practices in FOREST4EU

	Start early	Know the policy process	Involve evidence champions and brokers	Context matters	Make research products timely, relevant, and accessible	Indicators
1. Policy focus groups	Candidates for PFGs were invited in 1st project year and meetings implemented throughout 2nd year	PFG meetings were fora to discuss national and regional perspectives on CAP and forest-related EU policies	Representatives of forest sector organizations and innovation projects and initiatives participated as speakers	PFGs covered three macro-regions (Central, South-East, South-West Europe) to reflect different forest regimes	Findings of ongoing research was shared to gain early feedback from target audience	3 Policy Focus Groups 9 PFG meetings 184 participants
2. Knowledge transfer workshops	Implementation of knowledge transfer workshops built on early engagement with practitioners in project	Workshop participants learned about EIP Agri measure in CAP	OG representatives were invited to speak about their innovations	Workshops highlighted importance of aligning forestry funding with rural development in each country	Interactive format of OG presentations incl. Q&A facilitated cross-country dialogue	3 workshops in 3 countries with limited uptake of OGs in forestry and agroforestry 60 participants
3. Forest Innovation Workshop	This major event in Brussels, involving multiple partners, was planned roughly one year before implementation	Policies relevant for innovation incl. CAP, research, bioeconomy, nature conservation and climate policy were discussed	7 scientific presentations 3 COM presentations 1 keynote 4 representatives from Europ. regions & 1 policy officer in round table	How context matters for successful innovation was discussed in the breakout sessions; invited OGs shared their insights	Website creation for 2025 and future forest innovation workshops Publication of report with links to presentations shortly after workshop	13 partner projects 14 EIP Agri OGs 3 panel discussions 4 Breakout sessions 1 Regional round table 150 participants

	Start early	Know the policy process	Involve evidence champions and brokers	Context matters	Make research products timely, relevant, and accessible	Indicators
4. International study visits	Study visits were prepared roughly 6 months before implementation	Policies relevant for innovation incl. CAP and rural development were discussed	OG innovators and other local experts shared insights and experiences with participants	Study visits revealed context factors for successful innovation and opportunities for scaling	Study visits showed how collaboration of research, practitioners and start-ups can drive innovation	5 study visits 16 OGs visited 10 nationalities 132 participants
5. Policy briefs	Policy briefs were developed throughout 3rd project year	Project milestone "List of policy-making processes relevant for ITHubs" informed policy briefs	ITHub leaders, project leader and interested project partners were closely involved	ITHub leaders used perspectives gained from study visits for key messages of briefs	Dissemination strategy that spans multiple levels and fora, and targets EU decision-makers	6 policy briefs 2-4 pages each *

* Number of impressions per LinkedIn post: Transversal: 996; ITHub1: 965; ITHub2: 413; ITHub3: 770; ITHub4: 553; ITHub5: 508. (10/11/2025)

Francesca Gianetti (UNIFI), coordinator of FOREST4EU:

“

Innovation in forestry and agroforestry primarily arises from social processes: it's not just about technology, but about people coming together to collaborate and tackle common challenges. Effective communication and dissemination of ideas are essential to drive progress. Innovation thrives in peer-to-peer networks, where peer-to-peer exchange allows for more concrete and shared solutions.

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Partners

Coordinator



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