

Sustainable Bioenergy Use and Europe's Growing Forests

Brussels, 30 November 2021 - Bioenergy Europe is pleased to announce the release of the sixth chapter of its [Statistical Report 2021](#) looking at the current state of play of [biomass supply](#), forest and land management, and agricultural biomass.

Bioenergy is the main renewable energy source in the EU and its use diversifies Europe's energy supply, creates growth, jobs, and lowers greenhouse gas emissions.

- 70% of the inputs for bioenergy come from woody biomass, primarily residues and waste products such as branches and sawdust from forest-based industries.
- Agricultural residues from farming represents 20% of biomass feedstock. Climate change mitigation scenarios from the European Commission, IEA, and IRENA indicate an increasing use of agricultural residues and biomass as a greater focus on the circular bioeconomy drives material utilisation and the valorisation of waste products.
- The remaining 10% of inputs are organic waste from both industry and municipal collection.

Considering that wood is the largest bioenergy feedstock, its relations with forests and forestry practices must be carefully analysed. In fact, since 2000 the use of bioenergy has tripled (from 41 Mtoe in 2000 to 117 Mtoe in 2020), providing renewable energy for the most carbon intensive sectors such as heating, transport, and electricity. So, during this period, what was happening in European forests?

In 2020, the total forests stock in the EU27 amounted to around 28 billion m³ of wood. According to FAO, EU-27 forest coverage gained on average 262.000 hectares every year between 2021 and 2020. In addition, the overall forest density has risen from 133 m³/ha in 1990 to 173 m³/ha in 2020.

Despite the growth in bioenergy, there has been no significant change in the shares of wood removal by end-use. In fact, the ratio of wood fuel to industrial round wood (for sawmills, pulp and panels) has remained almost unchanged (19-81% in 2000; 23-77% in 2020). These figures further confirm that the increased bioenergy use was possible due to a more efficient use of residues and growing synergies with the forest-based industry rather than intensified harvesting practices.

Forests are increasingly subjected to stress due to climate change, weakening the defence systems of individual trees and increasing the overall vulnerability of forests. With an increasing area of forests being annually affected by pests, fires, and other climate disturbances, responding to these disturbances is becoming more important. Bioenergy plays an essential role by providing a market for low quality residues and contributes to the affordability of necessary management operations. The valorisation can thus help defray costs and provide funding for forest owners to improve the health of their forests and respond to disturbances.

Bioenergy Europe's Secretary-General, Jean-Marc Jossart, highlights that *“Member States are best positioned to identify the optimal ways to manage their forests. Geographical and climatic differences between countries require an approach that satisfy each Member States’ unique situation”*.

Jossart adds: *“In this respect, EU policies should focus on the goals to allow Member States to deliver on their objectives rather than imposing methods that would never otherwise be universal. This includes attempts to regulate forestry through non-forestry legislation like the Renewable Energy Directive, rather an integrated approach should be promoted to help reduce forest vulnerability”*.

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