

## **SMURF PROJECT LAUNCHES ITS CASCADE FUNDING FIRST CALL FOR SMALL FOREST OWNERS' ORGANISATIONS**

- **Applications will be open from 2 September to 30 October**
- **This 1st call for Cascade Funding aims to get accurate and on the ground information about forest ownership, management practices, forest types, business opportunities and challenges, legal regime, resources and support systems of the small forest holdings across Europe**
- **The Innovative Horizon Europe project SMURF aims to shape the future of Small Forest Holdings in Europe, with strong participation of sectoral representatives**

*(Madrid, Spain – 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, 2024)* - The SMURF project, a pioneering 48-month Horizon Europe initiative, launches its first open call for applications today, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2024. This cascade funding program will distribute up to €200,000 in this first call in funding for associations, federations, confederations, consortium or cooperatives of small forest owners to develop various activities.

SMURF, the forest owners' project, in line with the EU's forest strategy, will try to shape the future of Small Forest Holdings in Europe, with strong participation of sectoral representatives. SMURF will review existing business and management models and will propose and essay new alternatives that could enrich and diversify the European forest value chains. Through this research and multi-actor approach, SMURF aims to avoid risks of abandonment of forest management, identify values and arguments that could motivate small forest owners and consolidate proper land management and local forest value chains.

For achieving this goal, the SMURF project launches this 1st call for Cascade Funding, which intends to enhance the participation of organisations of small forest owners in the activities of the SMURF project to get accurate and on the ground information about forest ownership, management practices, forest types, business opportunities and challenges, legal regime, resources and support systems of the small forest holdings across Europe.

Key features of the funding initiative include:

- Individual grants ranging up to €5,000 per project.
- A target to fund up to 40 organisations across the EU.

- Focus on associations, federations, confederations, or cooperatives of small forest owners.
- Project execution period: 2025.
- Deadline for submissions: 30th of October 2024 - 17.00 CET

Álvaro Picardo, project coordinator at SMURF, emphasises the project's significance: "SMURF represents a paradigm shift in how we approach forest management in small holdings throughout Europe. With this cascade funding we aim to obtain direct information about European Small Forest Holdings, capturing the diversity of forest associations and cooperatives throughout Europe. It is an ambitious goal but we want to benefit from the organisations experiences and 'real life' expertise in the support of Small Forest Owners to take this knowledge and networking into action".

Successful applicants will contribute to conducting comprehensive surveys and interviews to profile forest associations and holdings, analyse legal and support frameworks, and participate in the Small Forest Holding Conference. This collaborative approach aims to create a pan-European network of forest innovators, fostering knowledge exchange and driving the sector towards a more sustainable and profitable future.

Future calls within the SMURF project will further support other activities of the project, setting up living labs focused on new business models and demonstrative stands for close-to-nature silviculture, promoting pilot projects for carbon credits, and communicating and disseminating activities during the years 2026 and 2027.

For detailed information about the [SMURF project](https://www.smurfproject.eu/cascade-funding-smurf-project/) cascade funding, eligibility criteria, and application process, visit <https://www.smurfproject.eu/cascade-funding-smurf-project/>.

**About SMURF:** The SMURF project, aligned with the EU's Forest Strategy, promotes sustainable forest management through innovative Closer to Nature Silviculture practices (CNS) and a harmonised European Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) system. By integrating close-to-nature silviculture with innovative business models, SMURF creates a framework that enhances biodiversity and resilience, ensuring the economic viability of small forest holdings.

Ten organisations from Spain, Belgium, Italy, France, Portugal, and Denmark and diverse stakeholder engagement, collaborate with a translational, multidisciplinary, and multi-actor approach to provide holistic sustainability solutions across the forest-based value chain.. This project is granted by the European Research Executive Agency (REA) under the Horizon Europe program.

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