



Policies to promote the competitiveness of forest-based SMEs in resource-efficient European regions

*Strengthening competitiveness
through sustainable innovation*

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FBI4EU project

FBI4EU is an international project, implemented within the framework of the Interreg Europe programme 2021-2027. The project was created to support the forest industry operating in the European Union. The sector is mostly made up of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and the project is aimed at them. The cooperation of partners will lead to an increase in their competitiveness and innovation.

Project budget
1 649 909 EUR

8 partners

Project duration
01.04.2024 -
30.06.2028

The project will analyse actions and policies that have been applied in other European countries. This will enable the identification of effective and efficient strategies and good practices that can be implemented in partnership. In this way, the project will contribute to the modernisation of forest sector SMEs and support the use of sustainable and efficient resource management among them.



The FBI4EU project is part of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. It touches on important areas such as innovation, digitalisation, economic transformation and support for SMEs. The solutions identified by the project will be tailored to specific regions and their actual needs. The project is also in line with the objectives of Social Europe. Segments of the forest industry very often represent an important source of employment in rural areas. Support for these sectors will have a positive impact on the maintenance and growth of employment in these regions. Developing strategies, policies and increasing the competitiveness of SMEs also touches significantly on the issue of caring for the environment - the sustainability and resource efficiency promoted are in line with the objectives of the Green Deal.

Project aims and objectives

FBI4EU has a number of designated main objectives that it will carry out over the course of the project. These include:

- Enhancing the competitiveness and innovation of European forest-related SMEs and support their development.
- Promoting sustainable resource management and sustainable development. This will increase the efficiency of forest industry SMEs and reduce the pressure exerted by the forest industry on the natural environment.
- Supporting SMEs to implement eco-innovation - environmental solutions based on the use of appropriate solutions and technologies. These activities will have a huge impact on the forest industry's environmental impact and future resource availability.
- Improving and implementing targeted policies. They will be tailored to the unique conditions of individual areas and enable more effective support for forest sector SMEs.



The overall objective of the project to be achieved in the long term is to ensure the sustainable development of SMEs in the forestry sector. This will be achieved while meeting the goals and objectives set by the European Union in terms of economy and ecology.

Project phases and timeline

Core phase: April 2024 – March 2027

A phase based on the analysis of policies and strategies. Building links and relationships with stakeholders is also part of it. An important element is the exchange of knowledge and experience to build the capacity of those involved in the project.

Follow-up phase: April 2027 – March 2028

Phase involving the monitoring of implemented policies and their effects. It also includes an assessment of the actual impact they have on the forest industry and individual regions.

Closure phase: April 2028 – June 2028

Final stage of the project. Includes the final evaluation of the results achieved by the project and the solutions identified and implemented, the submission of the final report and the dissemination of the project results and outcomes.

Semester 1: April 2024 – September 2024

Semester 2: October 2024 – March 2025

Semester 3: April 2025 – September 2025

Semester 4: October 2025 – March 2026

Semester 5: April 2026 – September 2026

Semester 6: October 2026 – March 2027

**Core
phase**

Semester 7: April 2027 – September 2027

Semester 8: October 2027 – March 2028

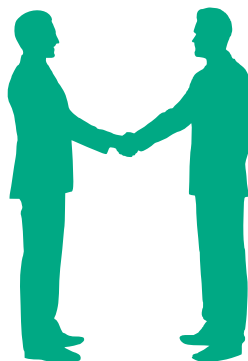
**Follow-up
phase**

Closure phase

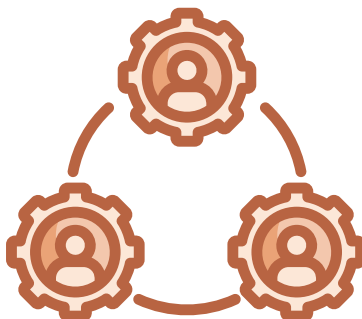
April 2028 - June 2028

Project methodology - common approach

The FBI4EU project relies heavily on mutual cooperation between partners as well as the involvement of stakeholders in the project. The learning process and exchange of experiences will take place through regional and interregional meetings. Regional stakeholder group meetings, interregional thematic workshops, study visits, interregional performance monitoring meetings and online bilateral meetings will be organised.



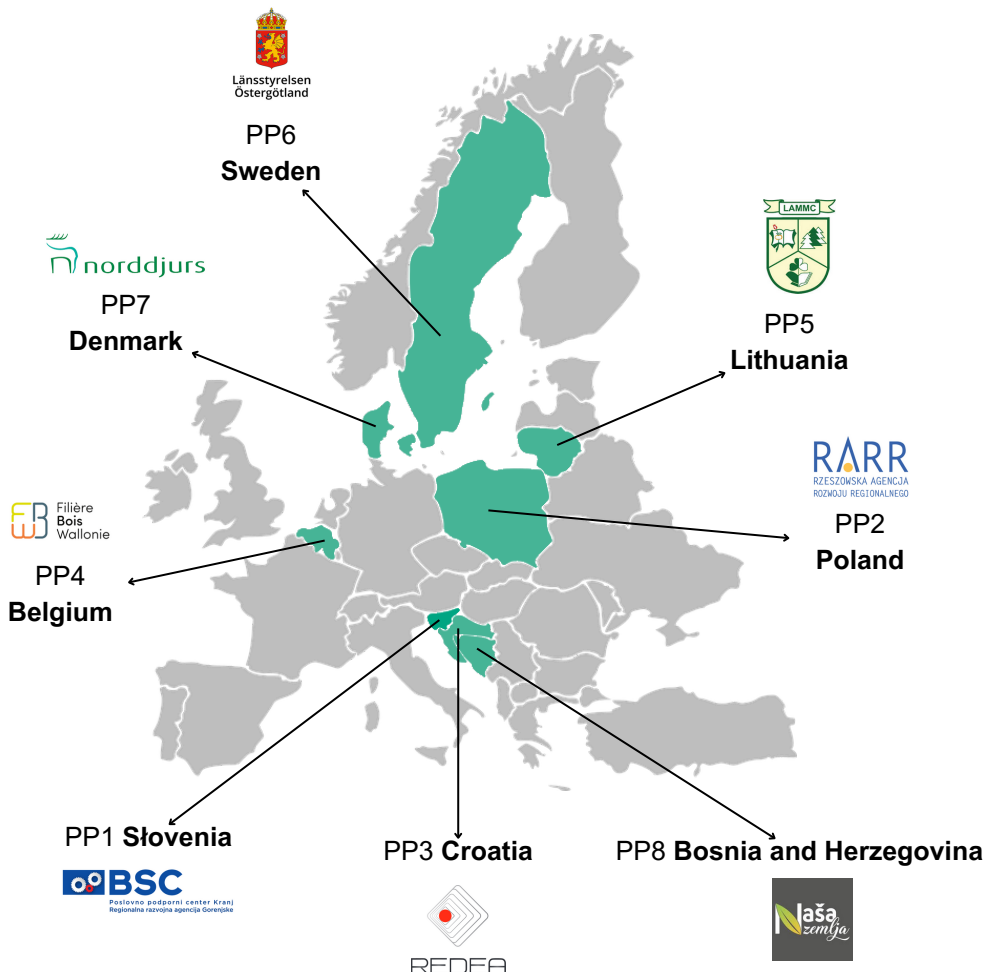
Engaging stakeholders in the project will be done by inviting and encouraging them to participate in various events, meetings, activities and workshops. Interest in the project among stakeholders will also be amplified through the dissemination of promotional materials and promotion of the project on social media.



An essential part of preparing strategies and policies is to analyse and learn about the state of the forest industry in the regions. In the framework of the project, the partners will prepare SWOT analyses of the individual regions in order to learn about their situation and identify their opportunities and needs. During meetings with stakeholders, discussions will also be held to find out their perspectives on the situation of the forest industry in each region, its opportunities and challenges. The assessment of the state of the forest industry in the regions will also be based on the conclusions of thematic workshops involving project partners, stakeholders and experts.

Overview of the Partnership

FBI4EU is an international project. By bringing together partners from seven European countries, it is possible to find solutions and good practices that are more universal and tailored to individual regions. By involving individual partners and stakeholders from their regions, a wider range of knowledge and skills can be accessed, which is key to success.



PP1: BSC, Business support centre L.t.d., Kranj (Slovenia) - an institution supporting the development of the public sector and SMEs of the Gorenjska region, through programmes and projects that increase regional competitiveness. It is the Project Leader and is responsible for project leadership and coordination, as well as outlining the initial methodology of the activity.



PP2: Rzeszow Regional Development Agency (Poland) - agency implementing regional and international projects. In this project, it is responsible for communication and the organisation of a thematic workshop on the role of policy instruments in supporting the forest industry.

PP3: Public Institution for the Development of the Međimurje County REDEA (Croatia) - regional coordinator for Međimurje County, actively supporting the process of sustainable development in the region. It is responsible for the analysis of partnership policy instruments, identification of good practices and workshops.



PP4: Wallonia Wood Sector (Belgium) - deals with the development of the forest industry in the region. In the project it offers extensive knowledge and experience in supporting the forest industry.

PP5: Lithuanian Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry (Lithuania) - a state research institute, conducting research and development work. It has specialized knowledge on forestry and ecological issues.



PP6: County Administrative Board of Östergötland (Sweden) - partner with extensive experience in international projects. It will develop a methodology for planning and designing inter-regional thematic workshops.

PP7: Municipality of Norddjurs (Denmark) - deals with policy development and strategy development for the region. Offers knowledge and expertise on the competitiveness of SMEs and business associations.



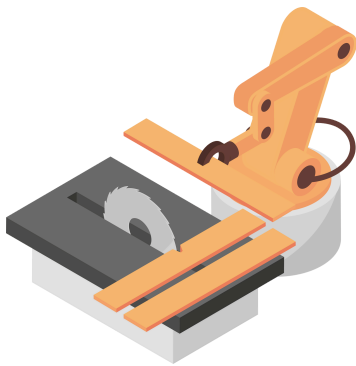
PP8: Our Land (Bosnia and Herzegovina) - organisation with strong links to the forest industry. It supports the development and competitiveness of SMEs and the application of environmental solutions. It will provide assistance in identifying good practices and collecting relevant data.

Background and relevance of forest-based SMEs


Forests in the European Union extend over 161 million hectares and are an extremely valuable resource. The forest industry, with the entire value chain based on it, is of great importance to the entire EU economy. It is also important for rural areas and local communities, as in some regions it is the forest industry that employs a large proportion of the population.



Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play the largest role in the forest industry - they make up the vast majority of the more than 400 000 companies involved in the sector. The actions they take have a direct impact on the effects that the forest industry has on the environment and EU forests. A greater focus on sustainability and more environmentally friendly solutions can ensure that a renewable raw material such as wood will continue to be available in the future. The role and importance of wood in industry continues to grow. New technologies and applications for this raw material are emerging.



Despite the numerous advantages of the forest industry, SMEs face many challenges. These pose a threat to their development and operations. In many situations, forest industry SMEs cannot count on concrete support from policies that are missing or do not meet their needs. The forest industry is increasingly required to integrate sustainability and environmental concerns into its operations, which requires concrete solutions. At the same time, in today's global market situation there is a problem of maintaining a market position.

A photograph of two hands shaking in a firm grip, symbolizing agreement or partnership. The hands are positioned within a large, teal-colored hexagon that has a white border. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a white wall and a hint of a window on the left.

**“Together, ordinary people
can achieve extraordinary
results”**

- Becka Schoettle

Role of policies in the project

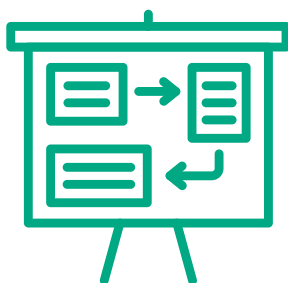
Policy instruments are policies, strategies and laws developed by governments and decision-makers. They are used to achieve specific effects in a particular area or region. They also include programmes and strategies that are created to support particular elements of a country's economy or to regulate their future. They are an important factor in the development of individual regions, provide stability to the business environment and represent an opportunity for SMEs. Appropriately tailored policy instruments are able to provide favourable conditions for the development of forestry-related businesses.

As part of the FBI4EU project, each EU project partner has committed to addressing specific policy instruments that are highly relevant to the region. These instruments include development strategies and plans and regional strategies. These instruments set out development directions and strategic objectives and priorities.



The individual partners plan to focus on making changes to the following policy instruments::

- **PP1** - Regional development program of Gorenjska Region 2021-2027
- **PP2** - European Funds for Podkarpacie 2021-2027
- **PP3** - Međimurje County Development Plan 2021-2027
- **PP4** - Strategic Plan of Filière Bois Wallonie
- **PP5** - Roadmap for Lithuania's Industrial Transition to a Circular Economy
- **PP6** - Regional Forest Strategy of Östergötland
- **PP7** - Planning and Development Strategy – The Road to 2050



Actions to be taken by the project to support the forest industry include:

- amending plans and strategies to take account of rapidly changing conditions and challenges;
- creating new programmes to be implemented within the framework of these instruments and to enhance innovation and competitiveness of SMEs;
- strengthening the effectiveness of already existing programmes in terms of sustainable development and promoting competitiveness;
- aligning the strategic objectives set out in the plans and strategies with those of the project.

The changes introduced in the policy instruments for the partner regions will have a significant impact on SMEs and the forestry sector in these regions. Introduced improvements will allow a greater emphasis on sustainable development in the regions concerned. More favourable conditions will be created for the development of innovation and competitiveness of forest-based enterprises. Incentives and support mechanisms for forestry SMEs may also be introduced as part of the improvement of policy instruments.



Applied solutions will also enable an easier and more efficient exchange of knowledge and experience between SMEs and research centres. This will provide SMEs with easier access to new technologies and solutions that offer many opportunities for development and growth.

Expected outcomes of the project

The FBI4EU project, through the involvement of partners and numerous stakeholders, is intended to support SMEs and the forestry sector as a whole. It is expected to increase the competitiveness and innovation of forestry SMEs and access to new markets. The application of new technologies and solutions will increase interest in the manufactured product.



Through knowledge and experience sharing meetings, good practices will be identified that can be implemented in other regions. These solutions are expected to form an important part of the project - already proven solutions, tailored to the regions and with a real impact on the forestry sector, will be introduced.

The project partners will make modifications to the policy instruments that guide the development of their regions. These changes will adapt these instruments to the needs of the forestry sector. In this way, they will provide comprehensive support for the development of forest sector SMEs and create optimal conditions for their development.

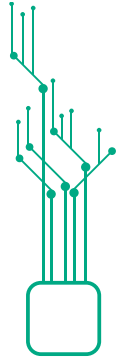


The effects of the project will also promote the sustainable use of resources and the sustainable development of businesses. Part of this is also the use of strategies and technologies that reduce the negative environmental impact of the forest industry. Eco-innovation and the use of green solutions will allow SMEs to increase interest in their offer. This will enable them to compete in markets where consumers are interested in buying sustainably produced products.

Long term benefits for Stakeholders

Participation in the FBI4EU project is an opportunity for actors, individuals and organisations associated with the forest industry. Through their involvement in the project, they can benefit in numerous and long-term ways.

For **SMEs associated with the forest industry**, the success of the project means numerous benefits as a result of the changes. The main benefit will be the adaptation of the business environment to their needs. The changes introduced in policy instruments will result in new development opportunities and support for the forestry sector. The direct effect will be increased competitiveness and innovation and an improved market position. On the other hand, access to new technologies and solutions will provide them with greater resource efficiency and open up new options for development.



The project's analyses and the data and information collected will be a valuable resource, allowing **decision-makers** to gain insight into the forestry sector. They will provide important support in decision-making and in the selection of applied solutions. The project will enable the selection of strategies that will make a real difference in the regions and among SMEs.

The project will also have an impact on **local communities**. The development of the forestry sector will have a positive impact on the entire region. It will lead to greater stability and increased employment, especially in rural areas heavily oriented towards the forest industry. On the other hand, sustainability and ecological solutions will ensure that the resources offered by forests can be used for a long time.





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Our sincere thanks to ***Interreg Europe***
and all **Partners** for their cooperation and
commitment to the project!