

People's Health Benefits from Forests, Trees and Green Spaces in All Stages of Life, Global Report Confirms

Existing evidence strongly supports a wide range of health benefits associated with forests. These include brain development in children, mental health and wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and cardiometabolic health in adults of all ages.

Forests, trees and green spaces are also crucial in enhancing social interactions and social health and have positive effects on cognitive ageing and longevity.

The global scientific evidence of the multiple types of benefits that forests, trees and green spaces have on human health has now been comprehensively assessed by an international and interdisciplinary team of scientists.



Enjoying the outdoors in Hallainvuori, Helsinki; Photo by Heli Virtanen

The outcome is presented in a major peer-reviewed report titled **“Forests and Trees for Human Health: Pathways, Impacts, Challenges and Response Options”** by the [Global Forest Expert Panels \(GFEP\) Programme](#) of the [International Union of Forest Research Organizations \(IUFRO\)](#).

The report highlights the important contribution of forests and trees to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its goals, particularly Goal 3 (SDG 3), which aims to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages."

Contemporary human health challenges differ across the globe. In low- and middle-income countries, health is mainly related to interactions with forests through food, medicinal plants, and clean water as well as infectious diseases.

In high-income countries, there is a higher dominance of non-communicable diseases such as heart diseases and diabetes, but also mental disorders. The positive impacts of exposure to forests and green spaces on mental, physical and social health are increasingly considered in urban areas.

There is mounting evidence that nature contact buffers against the onset of mental health disorders and can reduce related symptoms. A large-scale study in Finland found a clear association between nature contact and the risk for diagnosed depression. Research in Sweden reported that higher perceived naturalness in the neighborhood was associated with more activities and higher self-reported wellbeing.

In rural areas forests may also be visited and used for recreation and tourism, providing income to rural enterprises both in low- and high-income countries while bringing direct wellbeing outcomes to urban visitors. In northern Europe, outdoor recreation surveys show that 76% to 91% of the adult population visit forests - both urban and rural - each year.

“Regular visits to forests are shown to maintain and support human wellbeing”, says **Expert Panel Member Liisa Tyrväinen**, Research Professor at the Natural Resources Institute, Finland. “And”, she adds, “nature-based tourism is an important business sector, for example, in central and northern Europe and in the Americas. It has high potential globally in forest-rich countries where natural features of forests and forested landscapes have been well maintained”.

However, global crises such as climate change, land-use change, and biodiversity loss endanger the important role that forests and trees play for human health, as they are among the drivers behind wildland fires, heavy storms and forest pests, for example.

“Human health does not exist without forest health. In order to communicate this simple message, we need to learn to speak the same language across different sectors and disciplines. This means that researchers from forest and health disciplines, but also from human and social sciences, must work together in interdisciplinary projects. There must also be even stronger collaborations between society and academia to address real-life needs and establish evidence-based policies for the benefits of both the environment and human health,” says **Expert Panel Member Matilda van den Bosch**, Senior Researcher with the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal).

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Download report and Policy Brief at:

<https://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/gfep-initiative/panel-on-forests-and-human-health/>

Media Toolkit with fact sheet at: <https://www.iufro.org/science/gfep/gfep-initiative/panel-on-forests-and-human-health/outreach-and-media/>

Watch launch webinar at: https://youtu.be/vzGnD_dGkxA

About IUFRO

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations ([IUFRO](#)) is a non-profit and non-governmental worldwide network of forest scientists, who work together on a voluntary basis to enhance the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. IUFRO unites more than 15,000 scientists in more than 630 member organizations – mainly public research centers and universities – in 115 countries and is a member of the International Science Council. The organization was founded in Germany in 1892 and has been headquartered in Vienna, Austria, since 1973. The [26th IUFRO World Congress](#) will take place in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2024.

About GFEP

IUFRO's Global Forest Expert Panels ([GFEP](#)) Programme, established in 2007, combines diverse expertise to assess scientific knowledge about the role of forests and trees in achieving global goals and inform political decision making, mainly intergovernmental conventions and agreements of the United Nations (UN). GFEP primarily produces global scientific assessments conducted by interdisciplinary expert panels that unite leading scientists from around the world. Up to 2022, eight thematic reports in the frame of the IUFRO-led Joint Initiative of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests ([CPF](#)), and several related global and regional policy briefs have been successfully completed on a wide range of topics including food security, water, and climate change mitigation.

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