

Seeing the forest through the trees:

How sustainable timber buildings can help fight the climate crisis

Key takeaways

Problems



The building sector is a massive contributor to climate change and resource depletion. The most effective solutions to these problems include renovating and repurposing buildings or reusing building components instead of newbuild.



Forest harvest rates are too high globally, which results in a diminishing forest carbon sink capacity and biodiversity loss. Wood used in sectors where fast consumption leads to deforestation and high carbon emissions (particularly bioenergy) is simply a waste of resources. Prioritising timber use in the construction sector makes much more sense environmentally, although further research is needed on the available quantity of sustainable timber for buildings.

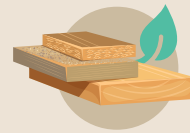
Solutions



To be sustainable, timber for buildings should be procured from secondary sources whenever possible, and, when this is not an option, from ecological forestry. Policy and standards should control the demand for timber, implement sufficiency and circularity measures, and set requirements for sourcing timber sustainably.



To restore forests to healthy levels, **biodiversity-friendly ecological forestry must be implemented**, supporting the multiple ecosystem functions of forests, in line with target 10 of the 15th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity¹.



Sustainably sourced timber is also a viable solution as it can substitute energy intensive concrete and steel, as well as store carbon as long as buildings and their components remain intact.

Summary of ECOS recommendations

We strongly urge policymakers to:

1



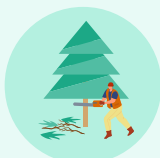
Introduce a framework to reduce and monitor the whole life carbon (WLC) impact of buildings.

2



Implement circularity and sufficiency (ecodesign) principles and a cascading use of wood, thus prolonging carbon storage of construction materials and optimising timber use.

3



Ensure a just transition of the forestry sector towards robust ecological forestry approaches, and support wood-based sectors in creating more added value from timber for the construction sector.

4



Implement and enforce a robust sustainable sourcing framework for timber and other risk-prone materials.

5



Improve data quality from monitoring of the state of forests and the impacts of forestry in order to enable support schemes for climate mitigation and biodiversity in forests and from construction.

6



Require the development of environmental assessment methodologies (such as lifecycle assessment, LCA) that encompass forest carbon dynamics and ecosystem multifunctionality following harvest.

7



Based on a robust environmental framework, make reasonable use of sustainably sourced timber in construction where decision tools (such as LCA) support it.

Find out all ECOS policy recommendations in the full report

