



Country reporting process and voluntary updates

FRA 2025

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Global Forest Resources Assessment

FAO has monitored the world's forests at 5-10 year intervals since 1946. The recent Global Forest Resources Assessments (FRA) are produced every five years to provide a consistent approach to describe the world's forests and how they are changing.

During this period, the scope of FRA has evolved from timber-focused inventories to more holistic assessments that seek to respond to increasing information needs related to all aspects of sustainable forest management. At the same time, countries' role in the FRA data collection process has been strengthened, and the country reports prepared by the National Correspondents, their alternates and other national contributors have become a cornerstone of the process.

FRA 2025 reporting builds on previous assessments. The reporting content has been further streamlined to increase efficiency and reduce countries' reporting burden. The changes made respond to recent developments in the international forest policy arena, such as the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests 2017-2030 (UNSPF), the Paris agreement and Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. Furthermore, the online reporting platform created for FRA 2020 has been further developed to facilitate reporting and ensure data quality. These changes have been made with the support of international experts consulted during the Eighth Expert Consultation on FRA, held virtually in September 2022.

This document intends to support the FRA National Correspondents in preparing the FRA 2025 Country reports by providing information about the country reporting process, including an overview of the process for future voluntary updates.

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1 Introduction

The FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment programme (FRA) has received technical guidance and support from international specialists through expert consultations at regular intervals over the last three decades. The first consultation was held in 1987 in Kotka, Finland and it was followed by a series of periodical expert consultations, each of which has provided specific guidance for every consecutive global assessment.

This document provides an overview of the reporting process for FRA 2025, including the following:

- 1) FRA 2025 timeline
- 2) National Correspondents network
- 3) Capacity development plan
- 4) Review and validation of FRA 2025 Country reports
- 5) Data analysis and dissemination of results

The document also includes a section on voluntary updates which is a new feature of the FRA process. It was requested by COFO 2020 to respond to an increased demand for timely and accurate information about the world's forest resources for the monitoring of progress towards the SDGs as well as other international processes.

The FRA 2025 country reporting process as well as the proposal on voluntary updates in-between regular FRA reporting cycles were presented and discussed at the online FRA 2025 Expert Consultation (12-23 September 2022), and guidance and recommendations from this consultation have been incorporated in this document.

2 The regular FRA 2025 country reporting process

2.1 FRA 2025 timeline

The scope of FRA 2025 will be finalized based on the recommendations from the Expert Consultation and the reporting platform implemented accordingly.

Until the end of 2022, the work will concentrate on the establishment and strengthening of the FRA 2025 national correspondents' (NC) network. The reporting and review process will take place mainly in 2023, while the analysis of the results and preparation of dissemination material will happen in 2024. The launch and dissemination of the results are scheduled for 2025.

Table 1 outlines FRA 2025 milestones, while the following sections describe in detail some of the main components of the process.

Table 1. FRA 2025 Milestones

Activity	Date	Notes
Establishment of FRA 2025 NC network	October 2022	Official letters sent to the Heads of Forestry to confirm current NCs or nominate new ones
Finalization of FRA 2025 scope	November 2022	See background paper #1
Finalization of improvements and changes of the FRA platform	December 2022	
Launch of reporting process	February 2023	All NCs are granted access to the prefilled country reports in the FRA platform
Regional/sub regional workshops	February to December 2023	NCs and reviewers meet to work on the compilation and review of the FRA 2025 country reports
Finalization of the reporting process	December 2023	The finalized country reports have been submitted and it is not possible to edit reports
Analysis of preliminary results	December 2023-January 2024	Preliminary analysis and cleaning of data
Validation of FRA 2025 country reports	February 2024	Heads of Forestry validated the final country reports
Analysis and write up	February 2024-June 2024	Data analysis, followed by report writing
Editing, layout, translations of FRA publications and fine tuning of platform user interface	June 2024-February 2025	
Launch of FRA 2025 results	March to October 2025	Release of the FRA 2025 results and publications

2.2 Establishment of FRA 2025 National Correspondents network

National data submitted by the countries through a network of officially nominated National Correspondents constitute the backbone of FAO's Global Forest Resources Assessment. The establishment of a formal FRA's National Correspondent network started with an official request sent by the Director of the FAO's Forest Division to the Heads of Forestry (HoF). Each country nominated a National Correspondent and an Alternate National Correspondent. Since FRA 2005, countries have been asked to confirm or provide a new nomination for each new FRA cycle.

The 342 National Correspondents and Alternates that were nominated for FRA 2020, established a national team of experts to work on the compilation of their country reports and more than 700 national experts contributed to the reporting process through the online platform.

The process for the nominations of the new NCs for FRA 2025 was initiated immediately after the Expert Consultation which was conducted in September 2022.

Taking into consideration that FRA in coming years will allow countries to provide updated information on key indicators, including the Sustainable Development Goals indicators, and the possibility to do so through the new online reporting platform (see Chapter 3 for more details), there is a need to adapt the NCs nomination process accordingly.

For this reason, countries will be asked to nominate a NC and an Alternate (or confirm the previous nominations) who will be in charge of the FRA 2025 country reporting and following assessments until a new nomination will be communicated to the FRA Secretariat. Nominations of qualified women was strongly encouraged.

Before the beginning of a new reporting cycle, the national forestry authorities will be reminded/informed of the nominations in place, but without a new nomination, it will be assumed that the same experts are still in charge.

To take into account these changes, the letters to request the NC nomination will include revised terms of reference for the NCs, whose immediate task is to assist the FRA Secretariat in the implementation of the reporting process and more specifically to:

- act as a focal point for communication with FAO on matters related to the FRA Programme;
- set up and coordinate a national team of collaborators to assist with the FRA reporting, including the coordination of inputs from different national institutions to ensure completeness and consistency of the reporting;
- access the online FRA platform to input and process national data in accordance with the reporting methodology and timeframe; this may include the voluntary update in case the country wishes to update or correct any reported figure in between two FRA reporting cycles;
- participate (or designate the participation of another expert from the national team) in meetings and workshops organized in the context of FRA;
- communicate and share information with national stakeholders, the national statistical office for the SDGs and UNFCCC focal points to ensure consistency of reported data and increase awareness and knowledge of the FRA process at the national level before the final submission of the country report;
- liaise with the HoF for validation of national information before publication; and
- maintain updated contact details in the online platform and liaise with HoF to make sure that in case of any change, a new nomination will be communicated to the FRA Secretariat.

2.3 Regional/subregional training workshops

Considering the continued complexities in international travels, there will be no global meeting of NCs to launch the beginning of the reporting process. Instead, capacity development will be carried out through a number of regional and subregional workshops with an increased focus on region-specific discussions.

If the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions allows and the financial resources are made available, the regional/subregional workshops will be in-person events to which the NCs of the region will be invited.

The intention is to organize in every region or subregion a first workshop where NCs will be introduced to the reporting process and familiarized with the platform in order to start entering data. A second workshop will focus on the review of reported data and metadata to ensure consistency both of the reported data and transparency and traceability of the estimates. Between the first and second workshops, NCs and their team of collaborators will have four to five months to continue working on the compilation of their country reports. At the end of the second workshop, all country reports should be completed, reviewed and submitted in the platform for final internal validation (pending validation).

Compared to previous FRAs, countries will have a shorter reporting period to finalize their report, during the time between the first kick-off workshops and the second review workshops.

By shortening the reporting period, it will be easier to maintain the momentum following the nomination process and to have closer and more intense communication with the NCs between the two workshops.

Moreover, this time the reporting will be substantially facilitated by the fact that country reports will be prefilled with the information provided in the FRA 2020 reporting. Also, having doubled the time dedicated to the regional workshops will help reduce the reporting time for NCs. This is because, as learned from previous assessments, NCs usually work more efficiently during the regional workshops when they can concentrate for few days exclusively on the reporting task and at the same time benefit from the assistance of a dedicated team of FAO reviewers that can address any issues they may encounter.

The regional/subregional workshops are scheduled to take place during 2023. A draft plan for the regional workshops is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Draft plan for the regional training workshops

	2023										
Regional groups	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Caribbean	2nd half					1st half					
Anglophone Africa		1st half					2nd half				
Francophone Africa		2nd half						1st half			
Pacific			1st half					2nd half			
Latin America			2nd half						1st half		
North America and Europe				1st half					2nd half		
Asia				2nd half						1st half	
<i>Central Asia</i>					1st half					2nd half	
Near East and Northern Africa					2nd half						1st half

First workshop: 3 days. To launch the new reporting process, go through the platform functionalities and the data needed, as well as establish the work plan at the national level for reporting and validation. For experienced countries or countries with no new data, part of the reporting could already take place at the first workshop.

Second workshop: 3 days. To provide technical assistance with the reporting and review the reports for final submission by the end of the workshop. This workshop is optional for countries that already completed the reporting process during the first workshop.

2.4 Review and validation of FRA 2025 country reports

The review process will be carried out with similar modalities to previous FRAs. Identified regional focal points together with a selected number of additional reviewers will provide technical assistance to the NCs for the compilation of the country reports.

The regional focal points and reviewers will provide technical assistance and guidance to the NCs both during the regional and sub regional workshops (where it is expected that most of the review work will be carried out), and remotely in between the first and second workshop, through the FRA platform.

Once the review process is complete, the reviewers will change the status of the country report in the platform to “pending validation” and an automated message is sent to the NC and the Alternate, informing them that the report has been cleared and it is ready to be validated by the HoF. The validation allows national authorities to review the country reports and to provide feedback, before their publication.

If no action is taken within two weeks, the report is considered validated and it will be locked for editing in the platform.

In the past, the validation process has been carried out through official letters sent from the FAO Forestry Director to the national authorities and the absence of any reply from the HoF was considered as a silent consent to the publication of the data. Having the validation performed through the platform will considerably simplify the entire process and will increase the level of involvement of the National Correspondents in the validation process. Further, the platform will keep a record of which country reports have been actively validated and which by silent consent.

2.5 Data analysis, preparation of the dissemination material and launch

Similarly to previous FRAs, analysis and aggregation of national data will begin after the validation and will allow extracting preliminary key messages that can be published and released several months earlier than the release of the complete database and the main report.

A longer period between the release of the Key findings and the publication of the Main report is needed to allow working simultaneously at the production of the report in all UN official languages.

As summarized in Table 3 below, it is proposed to have a first set of key messages published by the first quarter of 2025, the full database and the country reports released by the second quarter and the Main report in all 6 UN official languages before the end of 2025.

The possibility of collaboration for the publication of a scientific paper based on FRA data, similarly to what has been done in FRA 2020, will also be investigated. In addition, FRA data will also be used and disseminated through the SDG submissions.

Table 3. FRA 2025 dissemination material

Product	Period of releases 2025	Notes
FRA 2025 Key findings	1 st quarter	Available In all UN official languages in a digital and interactive format (not printed)
FRA 2025 Country reports	2 nd quarter	236 country and territories reports available for pdf download on the FRA website
FRA 2025 Full database	2 nd quarter	Available in all UN official languages for data analysis and download
FRA 2025 Main Report	3 rd quarter	Available In all UN official languages, digital and printed

3 Voluntary updates in-between regular FRA reporting cycles

3.1 Summary

This section presents a new feature of the FRA process which will allow countries to make voluntary updates of data reported to FRA whenever they have new data available or wish to correct earlier reported data. New country data will be disseminated on the FRA platform and included in the annual submission of data to the Sustainable Development Goals.

This chapter presents the background to this new feature and recommendations to countries related to the scope and process for performing updates. It also discusses some of the implications related to the dissemination of data.

Updates in-between regular reporting cycles are voluntary. Countries that wish to update should communicate their intention to the FRA secretariat in order to open up the platform for reporting. Updates will go through a review by the FRA secretariat and validation before new data are published.

It is not expected that the entire country report is updated. Countries may choose what reporting tables to update depending on their national circumstances and availability of new data. However, in order to maintain a consistent data set, any new data on forest area should be reflected in all area-related tables. Likewise, new data on stocks should be reflected in all stock-related tables. For updated tables, the historical time series should also be revised.

The possibility for countries to make voluntary updates will start in 2024 once the regular FRA 2025 country reports are finalized and validated. Updates made in 2024 may even be incorporated in the final FRA 2025 analysis and report if submitted in time. Countries may also submit updates in 2025, 2026 and 2027 until the country reporting for next regular FRA takes place in 2028.

3.2 Background

The possibilities of implementing voluntary updates within the regular 5-year FRA reporting cycles have been discussed the last five years, mainly as a result of the SDG reporting requirements where several of the indicators draw information from FRA and are reported upon annually by FAO to the SDG secretariat. While the SDG reporting process allows for repeating previous data arguing that no new data are available, FAO, as well as member countries, would like to see more up-to-date information reported to the SDGs, as well as in the dissemination of FAO statistics.

In July 2020, the 164th session of the FAO Council requested FAO to analyze the consequences of reducing the FRA reporting cycle to two years, to respond to an increased demand for timely and accurate information about the world's forest resources for the monitoring of progress towards the SDGs as well as other international processes.

This request was further deliberated by the 25th session of the Committee on Forestry (COFO) held in October 2020, where the way forward for the Global Forest Resources Assessment (FRA) was discussed. Among other, the Committee requested FAO to:

- a. *continue to produce an FRA report every five years;*
- b. *develop, in consultation with Members, Collaborative Forest Resources Questionnaire (CFRQ) partners, international experts and other stakeholders, a flexible FRA reporting process that allows voluntary updates of key indicators related to SDG15 and other indicators at the discretion of Members, as new information allows, while ensuring data quality and transparency.*

The introduction of voluntary updates between regular reporting cycles is a major change to the FRA process and will have an impact on many parts of the process, including the Terms of Reference of the National Correspondents and their Alternates, the review and quality control of reported data, and the validation process.

In the following sections of this chapter, the key aspects to consider when making voluntary updates are further elaborated, such as the scope and content of the updates, the timeline for implementation, the process, and the implications for countries as well as for the FRA Secretariat.

3.3 When to update

Countries are free to choose if and when they wish to update, within the general timeline presented later in this document. However, updates should only be considered if new data are available for one or more FRA variables or if errors are detected in previously submitted report. Updates should not be made just to extend a forecasted time series based on data previously submitted for the FRA report, neither only for updating the metadata in the report.

3.4 Scope

3.4.1 Variables to consider for updates

Countries may choose what reporting tables and FRA variables to update based on their national circumstances. However, it is recommended to consider updating one or more of the following FRA variables used to derive the indicators for the SDG reporting:

- Forest area and forest area change
- Above-ground biomass in forest
- Area of forest with a long-term management plan
- Area of forest within formally established protected areas

Countries may choose to update the entire report if they so wish. This would reduce the work needed for reporting to the next full FRA.

It is important to maintain internal consistency in the updated data set. As a consequence, an update of forest area implies that several other related reporting tables must be updated. Likewise, all variables related to stocks should be updated when new data on any of the stocks (growing stock, biomass, carbon) are available. In FRA 2025 the tables related to forest area and stocks are:

Forest area related tables	Stock related tables
Table 1a – Extent of forest and other wooded land	Table 2a – Growing stock
Table 1b – Forest characteristics	Table 2c – Biomass stock
Table 1c – Primary forest and special forest categories	Table 2d – Carbon stock
Table 1d – Annual forest expansion, deforestation and net change	
Table 3a – Designated management objective	
Table 3b – Forest area within protected areas and forest area with long-term management plans	
Table 4a – Forest ownership	
Table 4b – Holder of management rights of public forests	

All tables with new data should have corresponding updates of metadata, including data sources, national data, reclassification and estimation/forecasting.

For all tables that are updated, historical data should also be revised to ensure consistent time series.

3.4.2 Reporting years

Regarding the reporting years, the FRA 2025 specifications indicate the following reporting years for the FRA tables:

1990 2000 2010 2015 2020 2025

There are a few exceptions, such as disturbances and fire that will have individual years up to 2022, and ownership where latest reporting year is 2020.

In addition, the Sustainable Development Goal 15 indicator tables displayed at the end of the report are generated from data reported in the FRA tables. These tables begin at year 2000 and have individual years between 2020 and 2025, so the time series will be:

2000 (2005)¹ 2010 2015 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024 2025

The annual data points between 2020 and 2025 are interpolated and countries can override the interpolated values if they have data available for these years. Forest area reported in Table 1a will be interpolated to generate the 2005 value.

For the upcoming FRA reporting cycle, updates of the FRA tables will use the same reporting years as FRA 2025 with the exception of disturbances and fire where individual years can be added at the end of the table.

¹ Reporting year 2005 is included in the SDG reporting section only for forest area (Indicator 15.1.1) and for computing annual forest area change rates (indicator 15.2.1).

The data in the SDG tables (at the end of the report) should be revised and updated when data are available for individual years up to 2025, with a possibility to add individual years after 2025 if data are available. No forecasting should be done beyond 2025.

3.5 Time schedule for implementing voluntary updates

The following table presents the proposed time schedule for implementing voluntary updates:

2023	Full Country reporting for FRA 2025. All country reports should be submitted, reviewed and validated by end of 2023.
2024	Analysis of FRA 2025 data and preparation of FRA 2025 report Voluntary updates can be made , maintaining the same reporting years for FRA tables and SDG tables as in FRA 2025.
2025	Launch of FRA 2025 Voluntary updates can be made , maintaining the same reporting years for FRA tables and SDG tables as in FRA 2025.
2026	Voluntary updates can be made , maintaining the same reporting years for FRA tables and SDG tables as in FRA 2025.
2027	Voluntary updates can be made , maintaining the same reporting years for FRA tables as in FRA 2025, and for SDG tables also including 2026 if new data are available for 2026.
2028 and onwards	2028 is the year for full FRA country reporting , hence no voluntary updates are made this year. After evaluation, the cycle is expected to continue with necessary modifications depending on changes in scope and specifications for next FRA as well as possible changes in the SDG reporting framework.

3.6 Process for voluntary updates

The annual reporting process for voluntary updates is proposed to follow the general schedule outlined below. Flexibility to this schedule can be allowed to accommodate to the needs of individual countries. If new data are to be included in the annual SDG reports, data must be available, reviewed and validated by the end of the calendar year.

A country that wishes to make a voluntary update has to communicate this to the FRA secretariat. This could be done through a functionality in the platform, or by other means. This communication is important as it allows the FRA secretariat to selectively open the database only for the countries that wish to update and limit the review process to these countries.

First quarter	Countries communicate to the FRA secretariat that they want to update the FRA report. Mechanism for this to be further elaborated.
Second quarter	The database will be opened for updates for those countries that have communicated that they wish to update. Updated data should have been entered in the platform by end of June.

Third quarter	Review by the Secretariat, interaction with NCs to clarify issues and to ensure a transparent and consistent data set.
Fourth quarter	Validation, final adjustments if necessary, and closing of database before end of year. Data can thereby be available for the SDG reporting which is done in January-February the following year.

3.7 Implications for countries

Voluntary updates during regular reporting cycles have important implications for the countries. It provides an opportunity to include new national data, to correct previously reported data and to make new data accessible on the FRA platform as well as in the SDG database. However, it also implies additional work for the NC and his team to compile and enter new data and metadata in the platform; this may however reduce the workload for future FRA reporting.

A country that wishes to update, must communicate this to the FRA secretariat following a mechanism yet to be established.

As the reporting period is short, countries must allocate enough time for the NC and his team to make the update and to interact with the FRA secretariat during the review process. The NC will also be directly involved in the validation process.

Under this scheme, NCs will have a more permanent role and will be involved continuously in the FRA process.

3.8 Implications for the FRA secretariat

The introduction of voluntary updates also has implications for the FRA secretariat. A strict time plan for the annual update process must be established. Fluid communication must be maintained with the National Correspondents of those countries that have notified their interest to update, and the FRA platform must be adjusted to allow for annual voluntary updates as well as ensuring that new data are made clearly visible and distinguishable from interpolated or extrapolated data.

It will also require more work on reviewing updated reports as well as validation, analysis, preparation of aggregates and dissemination. All this will generate an additional permanent workload on the FRA secretariat, as well as a temporary additional workload in the beginning to further develop and adapt the FRA platform to facilitate these updates.

On the positive side, the review burden will be spread over more years and there will be more time to individually support some countries and build their capacities, which will contribute to increasing the quality of the reports.

3.9 Implication related to dissemination of new data

Voluntary updates in-between regular FRA reporting cycles have some implications on the dissemination of data. New data will be disseminated on the FRA platform, as well as in the SDG database and reports. Country reports generated by the FRA platform should be clearly marked with the date/year of revision, and new country data displayed on the platform should ideally be possible to distinguish from originally published data.

Each update will in some way affect regional and global aggregates and these aggregates will no longer be exactly the same as in the latest FRA report. It is therefore important to consider how to disseminate the new data and make sure that new findings are communicated at the same time as they are made publicly available on the FRA platform. For example, an annual bulletin with the latest global forest statistics could be prepared and disseminated. Selected updated statistics could be included in the biannual SOFO publication. In summary, the dissemination package related to the voluntary updates needs further discussion and deliberations as it also depends on how many countries (and corresponding forest area) decide to make voluntary updates.

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