

Great Forests of Mesoamerica

Concept Note

Program →

#TeamEurope

#Mesoamerica

#Data
#DecisionMaking
#Transparency
#Governance
#Biodiversity
#Conservation
#Production
#Sustainability
#Trade
#Defenders
#HumanRights
#People

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Context & Background

Click on ⓘ to access data sources.



Mesoamerica
and its Great
Forests



The EU Joins a
Mesoamerican
Initiative

Mesoamerica and its Great Forests

Although Mesoamerica's biodiversity hotspots cover less than 0.5% of the planet's land area, they contain between 7% and 10% of all known life forms, including **17% of all terrestrial species**. ⓘ It is one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. The Great Forests of Mesoamerica (GFM) cover southeastern Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. Added to the Trifinio Region (between Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras) these forests **reach an area of around 266 000 km² (more than 5 times the extension of Costa Rica)** containing approximately half of the region's carbon reserves that help curb climate change by preserving human and wildlife. They provide water, clean air, wood and non-wood products, as well as other vital natural resources for food security and **the direct and indirect survival of some 10 million people (the same population as Honduras)**. ⓘ Indigenous and local communities occupy **48% of the area of these forests**, and their presence is key to the conservation of its ecosystems.

However, Mesoamerica is highly exposed, vulnerable and heavily impacted by climate change, a phenomenon amplified by multiple inequalities (economic, ethnic, gender, etc.), shifting in land usage (deforestation and forest degradation that affect biodiversity) and the high economic dependence on natural resources for basic production. ⓘ Moreover, many challenges arise regarding the region's capacities

to enforce environmental legislation in order to stop illegal deforestation and the expansion of the agricultural frontier—add to this the presence of organized crime (connected to drug trafficking) and the migration crisis. Mesoamerica is also the region home to the country —Honduras— which in 2019 reported the highest *per capita* rate of violence against environmental defenders in the world, ⁽⁷⁾ a particularly worrying reality in the region.

As a result of all of the above, the last remaining forests are being destroyed at an alarming rate: **the loss of their intact cores has been estimated at 38% between the years 2000 and 2020 (almost 2% annually)**, mainly as consequence of agricultural activities and non-regulated livestock for export. If there is no greater integration and investment in the regional agenda, many negative trends will be exacerbated and these problems will worsen. Hence, different actors are joining efforts through multi-country, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral actions to ensure the conservation of the GFMS.



The Great Forests of Mesoamerica

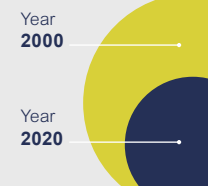


Source: Global Forests Watch, 2023. www.globalforestwatch.org

266k
km² of forests

- A** Mayan Jungle
- B** The Trifinio Region
- C** The Mosquitia
- D** Indio Maiz-Tortuguero
- E** The Amistad
- F** The Darien

38%
reduction of core
forests in 2020



48%
are indigenous and
forest communities

17%
of all terrestrial species
in the world

1,9%
annual loss rate of core
forests (2000-2020)

3 countries

in the region were among the **10 most dangerous** for environmental defenders worldwide, in 2019.

The European Union Joins a Mesoamerican Initiative

Since 2019, organizations such as the Wildlife Conservation Society (wcs), the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB), Re:wild and the Central American Environment Ministries have come together to develop a **long-term impact initiative to increase the resilience of the 5 Great Forests of Mesoamerica** with the participation of indigenous communities, civil society organizations, academia and governments. This joint effort was articulated around specific goals: protect 10 million hectares and recover another 500,000 hectares of forest; achieve zero extinction of species; reach zero unregulated livestock; and improving human well-being with an emphasis on indigenous peoples and forest communities.

At the **COP26** in Glasgow (2021), following a decision based on listening to the priorities established by various actors in the region aimed at environmental biodiversity and conservation, the UE announced a contribution in support of the initiative for the GFM through a **€4.15 million grant** from the DeSIRA (Development Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture) program. A pilot model of integrated co-creation of actions on the GFM was then initiated, which brought together the coordinated work of the Wildlife Conservation Society (wcs), CCAD-SICA, the Mesoamerican Alliance of Peoples and Forests (AMPB), Re:wild and the Alliance of Biodiversity

International with the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). The first positive results of this regional effort allowed the EU to present an scaling-up proposal the following year, approved by the CCAD-SICA Council of Ministers and announced during **COP27** in Sharm El-Sheikh (2022). This decision brought a new grant of **€25.5 million**, which will be joined by the co-financing of other cooperation agencies of the EU Member States. Hence, the initiative on the Great Forests of Mesoamerica (GFM) acquires the dimension of a Program, in an ambitious effort to consolidate the good results achieved so far in the preservation, governance and protection of the GFM and its people, in line with the past and present efforts of regional institutions and actors.

2019

“The Alliance” for the 5 Great Forests of Mesoamerica was established



2021

The EU listens to regional priorities and decides to support “the Alliance”

AT COP26

€4.15mill

grant through the DeSIRA project.

2022

First results of the “the Alliance” and DeSIRA project trigger the scaling up of the EU support: the **GFM Program** is born with a #TeamEurope approach

AT COP27

€25.5mill

+ the co-financing of Member States agencies.

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The Great Forests of Mesoamerica (GFM) Program



Objectives,
Components &
Lines of Action



A Great Alliance:
Multiple Countries,
Actors & Sectors



The GFM
Program
Secretariat

Based on the context described so far, the European Union has proposed **the creation of a five-year Program (2023-2027)** to support the scaling up of multi-country and multi-actor alliances. The main goal is to align the efforts of the EU and its Member States aimed at promoting a holistic and integrated approach to the protection and sustainable use of the Great Forests of Mesoamerica and the Trifinio Region. The **GFM Program** is carefully designed to be complementary and add value to activities supported by the EU and other partners at the national and sub-national levels. Its design will be carried out under the **#TeamEurope approach**, which brings together the coordinated efforts of the EU institutions and the Member States within the framework of the Global Gateway (2021-2027), guaranteeing results with a transformative impact for the region and its countries.

4
components

- Data & Decisions
- Governance
- Sustainable Use
- Rights & Defense

5years

From 2023 to 2027

€25.5mill

+ the co-financing of
EU Member States

8countries



Objective, Components & Lines of Action

The general objective of the GFM Program is to improve the protection and sustainable use of the Great Forests of Mesoamerica and other relevant forest areas (such as the Trifinio Region) in four specific components: **1. data and transparency for decision-making**; **2. forest governance**; **3. sustainable production and trade** with conservation and biodiversity; and **4. environmental rights and defense** of forests.

The implementation and lines of action in these four components—following the logic of the #TeamEurope approach—will be carried out by implementing partner agencies of the EU Member States: **AECID**, **GIZ**, **EF** and **SIDA**. Its development foresees actions at the regional, national and sub-national level (in specific territories), for which **cascading grants** will be available in conjunction with local partners. Likewise, the GFM Program contemplates synergistic articulations with other initiatives already underway on the Great Forests of Mesoamerica.

The main lines of action in each component of the program are:

Component 1: Data&Decisions

- Participation of countries in regional processes and commitments using forest data supported by the program and agreements to share data at the intersectoral and multinational level.
- Strengthening multi-stakeholder networks from various countries on the availability and use of data for evidence-based decision-making and transparency.

COMPONENT 1

Data&Decisions

Data + Transparency + Decision-making

Strengthening multi-stakeholder & multi-country partnerships on data availability and usage for evidence-based decision-making and transparency within the GFM.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES



COMPONENT 2

Our Great House

Governance + Conservation + Biodiversity

Enhanced transformative multi-country and multi-stakeholder initiatives for the GFM's forest governance, biodiversity conservation, restoration, and ecological connectivity.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES



COMPONENT 3

Our Future

Production + Trade + Sustainability

Transformative multi-country & multi-stakeholder initiatives enhanced for low-carbon, deforestation-free production and sustainable trade in the GFM.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCY



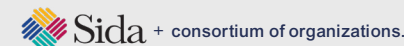
COMPONENT 4

Life is First

Defenders + Human Rights + Environment

Strengthening of multi-stakeholder and multi-country mechanisms for a safe and supportive environment for those who defend the environment, land rights, women's environmental rights and the rights of indigenous peoples in the GFM.

IMPLEMENTING AGENCIES



- Use of specialized forest data applications throughout several countries, for example: early warning systems for deforestation alerts, climate finance, forest fires, certification of deforestation-free territories, agriculture, forestry, etc.
- Direct beneficiaries trained in the use of digital data.

Component 2: Our Great House

- Support for interventions related to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and others.
- Direct beneficiaries trained in the use of digital tools for the sustainability of natural resources.
- Generation of forest monitoring initiatives at a multinational level.
- Participatory smart conservation systems with local communities and indigenous peoples in the GFMs.
- Support for the development and implementation of regulatory frameworks for the protection of wildlife, especially endangered species and transboundary habitat.
- Exchange of good practices in conservation management and monitoring.
- Direct beneficiaries trained in forest governance, landscape approaches and biodiversity & ecosystem services, also strengthening their monitoring capacities.

Component 3: Our Future

- Promotion of an integrated territorial approach to deforestation-free production and restoration of ecosystems and landscapes, aligned with AFOLU 2040 and PRIMAA.
- Traceability systems for agricultural products at risk of deforestation at the regional and territorial level.
- Public-private partnerships along strategic supply chains to reduce deforestation risks and promote restoration of critical ecosystems and biological corridors within the GFMs and adjacent buffer zones.
- Territories free of deforestation and promotion of the restoration of critical ecosystems and biological corridors in productive landscapes.

Component 4: Life is First

- Assistance to victims of human rights violations in the context of environmental defense.
- Strengthening of multi-stakeholder networks from various countries supported by the EU on environmental rights.
- Training of environmental human rights activists with greater skills for the defense of environmental rights.

3 levels of action

- ➔ Regional
- ➔ National
- ➔ Sub-national (territory/local)

A combined approach that includes **technical assistance tools**, working with **regional partners** and **cascading grants**.

100+ actions currently underway on the GFMs

The GFM Program is designed to **integrate synergies** with numerous actions already underway on Mesoamerican forests, carried out by various **local and international actors**.

A Great Alliance: Multiple Countries, Actors and Sectors

The GFM Program foresees a broad and coordinated participation based on **the alliance between countries, government institutions (national and regional), civil society sectors and other key actors linked to the Great Forests of Mesoamerica and the Trifinio Region**. The GFM Program will convene:

- Agencies of the EU Member States: GIZ, SIDA, AECID, EF and others that will join in the future.
- Environment, agriculture, forestry, climate change, trade and finance ministries or agencies.
- National agencies, academic institutions and research centers.
- Regional integration organizations involved in the protection, conservation and improvement of the governance of the Great Forests of Mesoamerica.
- Indigenous peoples and their organizations.
- Civil society organizations working on biodiversity, sustainable production, environmental rights and women's participation, including international environmental NGOs and research centers.
- Chambers of commerce and private sector organizations representing producers and exporters.
- Development banks and international financial institutions.

Multi-actor approach

#Agencies #Ministries #NGOs #Academia
 #Centers #Authorities #Organizations #People
 #SICA #CCAD #SIECA #CAC #OIRSA
 #Communities #Indigenous #CivilSociety
 #Chambers #Trade #Banks #Etc →

The GFM Program Secretariat

In order to ensure the efficient and coordinated operation of an intervention that brings together many partners and acts at various levels, the **GFM Program** has established a **Secretariat** within the framework of **#EureCA (EU-Central America Partnership Facility)**. The Secretariat is integrated by three main experts: a Coordinator, a Communication and Visibility Officer, and a Monitoring & Evaluation Officer. The Secretariat team supports the permanent operation of the necessary activities

throughout the five years of implementation of the GFM Program (2023-2027) and will ensure its coherence and alignment with the strategic objectives of intervention of the EU in the Mesoamerican Region.

In turn, the Secretariat will promote the constitution of two governance bodies: a **Management Committee** made up of the implementing partner agencies, and a **Consultative Committee** that incorporates interested parties and relevant actors on the GFM, with

the objective of providing orientations and strategic alignments for the implementation of the alliance between governments, indigenous peoples and civil society in favor of the Great Forests of Mesoamerica. In the Consultative Committee, instances of the Central American Integration System (SICA) —such as the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), the Central American Agricultural Council (CAC), among others— will play a central role.

**Great Forests
of Mesoamerica (GFM)
Program**

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European Union
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