



The EU Timber Regulation and Voluntary Partnership Agreements work together to combat illegal logging and improve forest governance

The EU Timber Regulation and Voluntary Partnership Agreements are two parts of the FLEGT Action Plan, the European Union's initiative to combat illegal logging and improve forest governance. FLEGT stands for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade.

The EU Timber Regulation helps to reduce illegal logging by ensuring that no illegal timber or timber products can be sold in the European Union. Voluntary Partnership Agreements are treaties with timber-producing countries that export timber and timber products to the European Union. These bilateral agreements help timber-producing countries to ensure that their timber and timber products sold to EU markets are legal.

What is the EU Timber Regulation?

The EU Timber Regulation is binding legislation that the European Union has introduced to reduce illegal logging in the world's forests. The EU Timber Regulation came into force on 3 March 2013. Under the regulation, the EU prohibits operators in Europe from placing illegally harvested timber and products derived from illegal timber on the EU market. 'Legal timber' is defined as timber that is in compliance with the laws of the countries where it is harvested.

Operators in Europe that place timber on the EU market for the first time must exercise 'due diligence'. This applies to timber harvested in the EU as well as imported into the EU. 'Due diligence' means the EU operator must minimise the risk of illegal timber in the supply chain. In order to do this the EU operator needs to have access to certain information set out in the Regulation, including about the tree species, origin of the wood and compliance with national laws and regulations. Operators in Europe are also required to take steps to assess and minimise the risk of placing illegal timber on EU markets. For exporters to the EU this means that your buyers will ask you for information about the origin and legal compliance of your timber and timber products.

The EU Timber Regulation applies to timber and a wide range of timber products including furniture, pulp and paper.



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Could the EU Timber Regulation affect your business?

The EU Timber Regulation may affect your business if you directly export timber or timber products to the EU. It may also affect you if your clients or their clients export timber products to the EU.

The Regulation applies to a wide range of timber and timber products. A comprehensive list of products covered by the law can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eutr2013/index_en.htm.

How can you prepare?

If your timber or timber products will be sold eventually in the EU, the importer will ask you for information to satisfy the due diligence requirements of the EU Timber Regulation. There are three simple steps to prepare for this.

1. Do not buy illegal timber.
2. Know and document the source of your timber or timber products.
3. Check your timber or timber products against the list of products covered by the EU Timber Regulation.

What timber does not require due diligence by EU operators?

EU operators only have to verify the validity of documentation for FLEGT-licensed timber and timber with a CITES permit. The EU Timber Regulation states that FLEGT-licensed timber is considered legal, because its legality has been verified using a system that has been agreed with the EU.

What is FLEGT-licensed timber?

A country that has a Voluntary Partnership Agreement and an operational FLEGT-licensing system based on that Agreement can issue FLEGT licences. A FLEGT licence is issued to timber and timber products verified as legal.

What about certified timber?

Timber certified under the main forest certification schemes will still be subject to the due diligence requirements of the EU Timber Regulation, so you can expect questions from your buyers about your certified timber supply.



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What is a Voluntary Partnership Agreement?

A Voluntary Partnership Agreement, or VPA, is a bilateral treaty between the European Union and a timber-producing country. Under this agreement, the timber-producing country agrees to control and license its timber exports as legal, and the EU agrees to accept only licensed imports from that country. These agreements are underpinned by strong timber legality assurance systems.

The purpose of a VPA is to ensure that timber and timber products exported to the EU come from legal sources. The agreements also help timber-exporting countries to improve their forest governance by increasing public participation in forest sector regulation and reducing illegal logging. For timber businesses, the VPA offers an advantage in the European market because all timber products with a FLEGT licence automatically comply with the EU Timber Regulation and so require no further due diligence measures on the part of European importers.

Making the timber trade fairer

For timber businesses that have voluntarily adopted responsible purchasing practices, the new rules are welcome because these rules make the timber trade fairer. Before the rules responsible companies risked being undercut by companies that were supplying cheaper wood, possibly from illegal sources. The new legislation sets a standard so that all buyers must buy responsibly.

FLEGT licensing of timber is expected soon

A number of countries have concluded negotiation of a FLEGT VPA with the EU but FLEGT-licensed timber is not yet being exported to European countries. Until FLEGT licences are available, exporters in these countries that want to export to Europe will be asked by their clients to provide evidence of compliance with national legislation. Even before full implementation, the definition of legal timber set out in FLEGT VPAs is a useful reference for checking timber legality.



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Do you want more information?

For more information on the EU Timber Regulation, visit the website of the European Commission Directorate-General for the Environment.

<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eutr2013/>

For more information on Voluntary Partnership Agreements and FLEGT-licensed timber, visit the website of the EU FLEGT Facility of the European Forest Institute.

<http://www.euflegt.efi.int>

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