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Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Note by the Secretariat

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

Evaluation 2018 and preparations for 2019

Results of Evaluation Survey of 2018 Regional Forum

1. Following the 2018 Regional Forum, an Evaluation Survey was sent to all registered participants. The annex reflects the results of the survey and provides, in particular, an assessment of various features of the Regional Forum and suggestions for the future by participants.

Preparations for 2019 Regional Forum

2. As decided by the Commission, the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region will be convened in Geneva in 2019.^a It will be aligned with the theme and the programme of work of the 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF theme in 2019 will be “*Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality*”. The following Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be under in-depth review at the HLPF in 2019, with SDG 17 (Means of Implementation and global partnership) being discussed every year:

- **SDG 4:** Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- **SDG 8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- **SDG 10:** Reduce inequality within and among countries
- **SDG 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- **SDG 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

3. The Government of Switzerland is supporting the 2019 Regional Forum, including by providing the conference venue, the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG). To ensure the availability of rooms, a tentative reservation has been made for **21-22 March 2019**. Switzerland has also provided support to fund travel of participants at the 2019 Regional Forum within the 2-year extrabudgetary project that had been approved previously by EXCOM.^b

4. As requested by member States, the 2019 Regional Forum will be organized in close cooperation with the other entities of the regional UN system. The secretariat stands ready to initiate preliminary discussions with partner organizations on the options to conceptualize the Regional Forum.

5. Informal consultations on the Regional Forum could be started after the summer break in September 2018, covering two main issues:

- The concrete format, modalities and content of the 2019 Regional Forum; and
- The renewal of the mandate to convene the Regional Forum after 2019.

^a E/2017/37-E/ECE/1480, Decision B (67).

^b EXCOM 94th Meeting, 6 November 2017, Informal Document No. 2017/60 Rev.1.

6. Taking into account the above information, EXCOM may wish to:
- Discuss the evaluation of the 2018 Regional Forum and consider lessons learnt.
 - Confirm the proposed dates (21-22 March 2019) of the next Regional Forum.
 - Request the secretariat to initiate preliminary discussions with partner organizations to explore options for the 2019 Regional Forum.
 - Request the secretariat to organize informal consultations of EXCOM on the next Regional Forum, starting in mid-September 2018.

Annex

**Results of the Evaluation Survey
of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region 2018**

1. Introduction and overall characteristics of the sample

The Evaluation Survey was sent to all registered participants in the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region 2018 (Geneva, 1-2 March 2018) on 2 March 2018. It remained open until 23 March 2018.

During this period, 92 responses were received (out of a total of 653 registered participants). Given the relatively low rate of response, results should be interpreted with caution. Most of the answers came from representatives of UNECE governments (38.0 per cent) and non-governmental organizations (35.9 per cent).

Table 1 shows the complete breakdown of respondents according to the organizations to which they belong.

Table 1. Organization of respondents

Group	Percentage	Number
UNECE Government	38.0	35
UN department, fund, programme, specialized agency or related organization	4.4	4
Intergovernmental and regional organization	5.4	5
Non-governmental organization	35.9	33
Private sector	3.3	3
Academia	2.2	2
Others (please specify)	10.9	10
Total	100	92

The governments who participated in the survey are Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. Responses were received by more than one participant in a number of cases. Switzerland, with nine responses, accounted for 25.7 per cent of all government answers.

Most respondents participated in the high-level policy segment in the first day and the *Connecting the dots* plenary session in the second day. The most attended round tables were the two on cities, in particular the one on *Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities: challenges and opportunities*, where 38.0 per cent of the respondents participated. Side events proved popular, as almost half of the respondents attended one of these events. Table 2 has full details on participation.

Table 2. Participation by segments, all respondents.

Segment	Percentage	Number
High-level policy segment (first day)	89.1	82
Connecting the dots. Plenary session (second day)	73.9	68
Round table: Making universal access to water and sanitation a reality in the UNECE region	12.0	11
Round table : Sharing water: balancing competing needs in a context of declining resource	12.0	11
Round table: Improving the efficiency of the energy system	13.0	12
Round table: Transforming energy in support of the 2030 Agenda	19.6	18
Round table: Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities: challenges and opportunities	38.0	35
Round table: Promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements	26.1	24
Round table: Successful approaches to delivering on Sustainable Consumption and Production by 2030	17.4	16
Round table: Towards a circular economy: innovation for sustainable value chains	20.7	19
Round table: Sustainable Forest Management and the SDGs	10.9	10
Round table: Biodiversity at the heart of sustainable development	12.0	11
Side events	47.8	44
Total Respondents	100	92

2. Assessment

Participants were asked to assess the Forum regarding five areas. Table 3 summarizes the responses received.

Table 3. Assessment by areas, all respondents, percentages

Areas	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	Total
Relevance of subject to your work/area of expertise	4.4 (4)	8.7 (8)	21.2 (25)	43.5 (40)	16.3 (15)	100 (92)
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	3.3 (3)	17.4 (16)	26.1 (24)	38.0 (35)	15.2 (14)	100 (92)
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	4.4 (4)	13.0 (12)	19.6 (18)	32.6 (30)	30.4 (28)	100 (92)
Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	2.2 (2)	7.6 (7)	27.2 (25)	31.5 (29)	31.5 (29)	100 (92)
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	6.5 (6)	17.4 (16)	23.9 (22)	37.0 (34)	15.2 (14)	100 (92)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The five areas received consistently high marks, although there are clear differences in how they were assessed by respondents. The Forum was particularly well perceived as providing an opportunity to establish new and useful contacts: 63 per cent of respondents considered that it was very or extremely useful on this regard while only 9.8 per cent thought that was not or just somewhat useful. Other areas that were well received included its role as a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experience with other participants and its relevance to the work/area of expertise of participants. By contrast, the assessment of the contribution of the Forum to the identification of good practices and useful experiences was rather polarised, as it was the area with the smallest positive difference between more favourable and less favourable responses: 52.2 per cent of respondents considered that the Forum was very or extremely useful on this regard while 23.9 thought that it was not or somewhat useful.

The assessment provided by UNECE governments (table 4), is rather similar, although there are some differences. Overall, governments were more positive across all areas. This is also the case for those areas that receive a more critical assessment. The difference between more favourable and less favourable responses regarding the contribution of the Forum to the identification of good practices and useful experiences is 28.3 per cent for the whole set of respondents, increasing to 48.6 per cent when only governments are considered.

Table 4. Assessment by areas, governments, percentages

Areas	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	Total
Relevance of subject to your work/area of expertise	2.9 (1)	5.7 (2)	28.6 (10)	48.6 (17)	14.3 (5)	100 (35)
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	5.7 (2)	11.4 (4)	25.7 (9)	40.0 (14)	17.1 (6)	100 (35)
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	5.7 (2)	5.7 (2)	17.1 (6)	31.4 (11)	40.0 (14)	100 (35)
Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	2.9 (1)	2.9 (1)	31.4 (11)	37.1 (13)	25.7 (9)	100 (35)
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	2.9 (1)	17.1 (6)	11.4 (4)	45.7 (16)	22.9 (8)	100 (35)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The 2018 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development introduced changes in its structure, with five parallel round tables covering two main topics each to facilitate peer-learning. The survey incorporated a question on different aspects of this peer-learning experience at the round tables. The full set of answers provided to this question can be found in table 5.

Table 5. Assessment of the peer-learning experience at the round tables, all respondents, percentages.

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
Overall assessment	3.5 (6)	16.5 (28)	24.7 (42)	48.9 (78)	9.4 (16)	100 (170)
Organisation of the discussions	7.1 (12)	18.8 (32)	23.5 (40)	36.5 (62)	14.1 (24)	100 (170)

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
Case studies presented	1.8 (3)	15.3 (26)	35.3 (60)	37.6 (64)	10.0 (17)	100 (170)
Time management	1.2 (2)	8.2 (14)	25.3 (43)	47.1 (80)	18.2 (31)	100 (170)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets. As respondents participated in more than one round table, the number of responses exceeds the number of participants.

The overall assessment was positive, with 55.3 per cent of responses assessing the peer-learning experience as very good or excellent, although a 20.0 per cent considered that it was poor or needed improvement. Time management attracted the highest positive and the lowest negative marks. Responses were more critical with the other two aspects-organisation of the discussions and case studies presented. In particular, 25.9 per cent of the responses indicated that the organisation of the discussions was poor or needed improvement.

The answers of government participants only are shown in table 6. The assessment is consistently more positive across the different aspects, with higher favourable and lower unfavourable answers in comparison with the whole sample, but there are no significant differences in the overall rankings. In particular, 64.7 per cent of responses considered that the peer-learning experience was very good or excellent, against only 16.2 per cent that assessed it as poor or in need of improvement. Time management is the best performing aspect, while the organisation of the discussions received a particularly bad mark: 17.7 per cent of the responses considered that it was poor or needed improvement.

Table 6. Assessment of the peer-learning experience at the round tables, governments, percentages.

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
Overall assessment	4.4 (3)	11.8 (8)	19.1 (13)	51.5 (35)	13.2 (9)	100 (68)
Organisation of the discussions	5.9 (4)	11.8 (8)	23.5 (16)	39.7 (27)	19.1 (13)	100 (68)
Case studies presented	1.5 (1)	7.4 (5)	32.4 (22)	48.5 (33)	10.3 (7)	100 (68)
Time management	0.0 (0)	7.3 (5)	25.0 (17)	50.0 (34)	17.6 (12)	100 (68)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets. As respondents participated in more than one round table, the number of responses exceeds the number of participants.

Participants were also asked to provide their opinion on various aspects regarding the preparation and organization of the Forum, which are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Assessment of the preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum, all respondents, percentages

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
Programme	0 (0)	16.3 (15)	20.7 (19)	47.8 (44)	15.2 (14)	100 (92)
Structure of the Forum	4.4 (4)	16.3 (15)	20.7 (19)	35.9 (33)	22.8 (21)	100 (92)
Documentation	2.2 (2)	10.9 (10)	33.7 (31)	39.1 (36)	14.1 (13)	100 (92)
Communication with participants prior to the event	6.5 (6)	12.0 (11)	17.4 (16)	40.2 (37)	23.9 (22)	100 (92)
Organizational arrangements for and during the event	3.3 (3)	8.7 (8)	23.9 (22)	37.0 (34)	27.2 (25)	100 (92)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The aspect which received the most positive assessments were the organizational arrangements for and during the event (64.2 per cent of respondents thought that it was excellent or very good, while only 12.0 per cent considered that it was poor or needed improvement) and the programme of the Forum (63.0 per cent against 16.3 per cent, in the same classification).

By contrast, comparatively less favourable assessments were received regarding the structure of the Forum (58.7 per cent of respondents stated that it was excellent or very good, while 20.7 per cent considered it poor or needing improvement) and documentation (53.2 per cent and 13.1 per cent, in the same classification).

Communication with participants prior to the event also received high marks, although the assessment was somewhat polarised. While there was a relative large percentage of respondents that gave an unfavourable assessment (answers indicating that performance in this area was poor or needed improvement accounted for 18.5 per cent), this was balanced by a large percentage of respondents who assessed this area positively (64.1 per cent).

The assessment of preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum by government participants (table 8) is far less critical than in the overall sample. The structure of the Forum is the area most government respondents singled out as needing improvement (14.3 per cent of total). However, this aspect was also appraised as excellent or very good by 77.1 per cent of respondents. This is an area that received both the more favourable and less favourable assessments, with a net difference that is largely positive (62.8 per cent). Communication with participants prior to the event and organizational arrangements for and during the event received high favourable marks (74.3 per cent considered that performance was excellent or needed improvement) while only 2.9 per cent thought that they were poor or needed improvement.

Table 8. Assessment of the preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum, governments, percentages

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
Programme	0.0 (0)	8.6 (3)	17.1 (6)	60.0 (21)	14.3 (5)	100 (35)
Structure of the Forum (plenary and parallel round tables)	5.7 (2)	8.6 (3)	8.6 (3)	45.7 (16)	31.4 (1)	100 (35)
Documentation	0.0 (0)	2.9 (1)	31.4 (11)	54.3 (19)	11.4 (4)	100 (35)
Communication with participants prior to the event	2.9 (1)	0.0 (0)	22.9 (8)	51.4 (18)	22.9 (8)	100 (35)
Organizational arrangements for and during the event	0.0 (0)	2.9 (1)	22.9 (8)	40.0 (14)	34.3 (12)	100 (35)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The overall assessment of the event was very positive (table 9), with 27.2 per cent of respondents considering that it was excellent and 47.8 per cent that it was good. There are no significant differences between the assessment given by all respondents and by government representatives, although the assessment by the latter is slightly more positive.

Table 9. Overall assessment of the Forum, percentages

Assessment	All respondents	Governments
Not satisfactory	8.7 (8)	5.7 (2)
Adequate	16.3 (15)	14.3 (5)
Good	47.8 (44)	48.6 (17)
Excellent	27.2 (25)	31.4 (11)
Total	100 (92)	100 (35)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

An overwhelming share of respondents (71.7 per cent) would recommend that other experts from their countries or organizations attend similar events in the future, while 21.7 per cent may consider such a possibility. Only one respondent declined making such a recommendation. Government responses show a similar assessment: while 71.4 per cent of respondents would recommend future participation, 25.7 per cent were not completely sure.

In their comments, respondents explained some of the reasons for their assessment of the Forum. Many participants stressed that the Forum was very useful to establish new connections and exchange experiences. However, some lamented that the current format was not conducive to more spontaneous interaction, although the improvement regarding last year's Forum was also mentioned by others. The variety of themes was recognised as one of the attractive features of the Forum. On the other hand, some participants considered that time for in-depth discussions was insufficient and that new ways to make the Forum more interactive should be explored. Representatives from civil society organizations (CSO) argued that CSO should be involved in the planning of the Forum. Some participants noted that they have been negatively impacted by logistical issues and others complained of the inconvenience of having registration at a different location from where the Forum took place.

3. Suggestions for the future

There were a number of suggestions for future work. Many of those concerned the need to make the event more interactive and, as many respondents were representatives from civil society organizations, give a more prominent role to these organizations.

Some specific suggestions that were raised by particular individuals concerning:

a) Focus

- More emphasis on cross-sectoral issues
- Allocate more time to technical sessions vis-à-vis general discussions.
- Reduce the number of presentations to have better focus and more time for discussions
- Ensure that good keynote speeches, as it was the case this year, are included in future editions of the Forum
- Ensure broader country participation, including from programme countries
- More careful selection of case studies
- Focus discussion on new ideas and areas where approaches are different, instead of repeating consensual views
- Organise round tables with a view to produce recommendations
- Side events could have been more clearly linked to the topic of the meeting
- Increase the scope to organise side events
- Produce a publication for the Forum

b) Partnerships and networking

- Specific time should be allocated for dialogue between member States and civil society
- Make more efforts to involve the private sector
- Create working groups that would remain active throughout the year

c) Organizational and logistic aspects

- Improve the registration system
- Ensure interpretation in all round tables

Suggestions on how to improve peer-learning at the Forum focussed mainly on the need to make round tables more interactive and facilitate more meaningful discussion. Some ideas proposed by particular individuals included:

- Put greater emphasis on the challenges of SDG implementation and the questions raised in background documents
- Use smaller groups
- Use professional facilitators
- Have shorter interventions by member States quickly summarising the situation in their countries
- Encourage more focussed interventions by member States to be complemented by interventions by other experts
- Make case studies more comparable through guiding questions
- Use electronic tools for non-presential participation
- Consider introducing a peer-review element for the evaluation of case studies against best practices
- Make background materials available sooner
- Produce a template to share relevant information among participants
- Give a specific role to civil society organizations in the discussion of concept notes and the provision of speakers

As for the substantive topics to be considered in future editions of the Forum, many respondents agreed that they should be aligned with the theme of the High-level Political Forum. In addition, some specific topics were proposed:

- SDG 17 should be covered in a specific session
- Monitoring mechanisms of SDG implementation
- Awareness and sensibilization initiatives
- A regional perspective on the review of the HLPF taking place in September 2019, in order to offer views on the integration of the regional level at the HLPF
- Collaboration with the private sector
- Gender equality
- Continue to provide a space for the VNR process