



Economic Commission for Europe**Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management****Eighty-fifth session**

Geneva, 2–4 October 2024

Item 3 of the provisional agenda**Report on the review of the Forum of Mayors**

Note by the secretariat

I. Introduction

1. The Forum of Mayors was established as a subsidiary body (“team of specialists”) to the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management by the Executive Committee (EXCOM) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) at its 126th session (Geneva, 13 January 2023).¹ As decided by the Executive Committee, and in line with the procedure contained in *Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of teams of specialists within UNECE* (ECE/EX/2/Rev.1), a review of the Forum of Mayors is to be undertaken before recommending its extension.

2. The ECE secretariat conducted the review of the Forum of Mayors through:

(a) Administering an online feedback survey: The survey was sent (on 10 October 2023) to some 370 representatives of member States, cities and stakeholders that had registered for the third meeting of the Forum of Mayors (Geneva, 2–3 October 2023);

(b) Organizing a review meeting (Geneva and online, 21 February 2024) to which it invited representatives of all the ECE member States’ permanent missions to the United Nations and other International Organisations, the members of the Bureaux of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management and of the Forum of Mayors Bureau, as well as representatives of those cities that had attended the Forum in the past.

3. The review meeting covered the following topics:

(a) Results of the feedback survey completed by the participants to the 2023 meeting of the Forum of Mayors in October 2023;

(b) A brief survey for collecting the review meeting participants’ feedback on the 2023 meeting of the Forum of Mayors;

(c) Open discussion to review elements of the Forum of Mayors such as:

(i) The format and type of interaction;

(ii) The theme;

(iii) The selection process of the cities.

¹ Decision relating to the Forum of Mayors (ECE/EX/2023/L.4).

II. Attendance

4. Over 30 representatives of ECE member States, cities, and local authorities, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and members of the Bureaux of the Committee on Urban Development, Housing, and Land Management, and of the Forum of Mayors participated in the review meeting of the Forum of Mayors.

III. Opening of the review meeting and adoption of the agenda

5. The Director of the ECE Forests, Land and Housing Division, opened the review meeting, and introduced the members of the secretariat. She presented the objective and the agenda of the meeting, explaining that that a review of the mandate of the Forum of Mayors and its extension were pre-conditions for the secretariat to continue to convene its meetings in 2025 and beyond.

IV. Results of the survey on the third Forum of Mayors' meeting

6. The Secretary to the Forum of Mayors, presented the "post-mortem" comments and the results of the feedback survey conducted after the third meeting of the Forum of Mayors (Geneva, 2–3 October 2023).

7. The main post-mortem recommendations included the following:

- (a) Avoid concurrent sessions/events to enhance possibilities to participate at all of them;
- (b) Simplify the selection process of participating cities for added clarity;
- (c) Streamline invitations, making them concise and having them co-signed by the Forum of Mayors Bureau members and the secretariat;
- (d) Increase interaction with member States;
- (e) Provide more opportunities for informal networking;
- (f) Formalize the outcomes of the event;
- (g) Engage city networks earlier in the process;
- (h) Maintain consistency in the communication strategy;
- (i) Expand the interregional segment of the event (that involves participation also from the other United Nations regions) for greater impact.

8. The results of the questionnaire survey of October 2023 can be summarized as follows:

(a) Thirty-eight individuals responded to the survey, primarily representing cities, academia and non-governmental organizations. The respondents rated their overall experience with the Forum with an average score of 4.5 out of 5;

(b) Participants appreciated various aspects of the Forum, including knowledge exchange, networking opportunities, interactions with diverse cities and countries, side events, specifically the one on "*Woman and Mayor: A Gender Perspective on Challenges and Visions for Cities*". They valued the opportunity to engage with professionals sharing similar goals and discuss global urban challenges, particularly related to climate change. Suggestions on how to improve the Forum included: extending the duration of the event; focusing on specific themes; and involving mayors from non-UNECE member States, including from the global south. There was also a call for more opportunities for informal networking and more interactive sessions to facilitate exchanges of information and dialogue among participants. Adding focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and particularly on their implementation at the local level was also proposed. Some participants suggested involving city networks, such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). The use of visual aids/presentations by speakers was also recommended to enhance

understanding and engagement by the audience. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of practical examples, dialogue and networking opportunities to amplify the effectiveness of the Forum;

(c) Roundtable discussions received positive feedback, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.21 out of 5. Participants appreciated the diversity of experiences and solutions presented, while suggesting certain improvements, such as the use of visual aids, increasing speaker diversity (including those representing youth and civil society), focusing discussions on more specific themes and enabling less formal interactions;

(d) Side events were well-received, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.5 out of 5. Attendance was balanced across various events;

(e) A majority of respondents (34 out of 38) expressed their intention to recommend the Forum to colleagues, and 29 indicated their intent to attend the event in 2024;

(f) At the end of the survey, participants provided additional feedback, expressing a desire for more interaction with member States, increased networking opportunities, greater inclusivity, involvement of local-level experts beyond mayors, and more representation of interregional mayors.

9. During the review meeting of 21 February 2024, the secretariat distributed to the participants a link to an online survey on the Forum and provided printed versions for those attending the meeting in person. The results of that survey can be summarized as follows:

(a) Nineteen individuals responded to the survey, primarily representing cities and member States. Respondents rated their overall experience with the Forum with an average score of 4.5 out of 5;

(b) Participants appreciated various elements of the Forum, such as knowledge sharing, networking opportunities, and engagement with other participants with diverse perspectives. They also appreciated exchanging best practice and networking with municipalities. The diversity of solutions presented and the sense of international solidarity among cities were also noted. Participants much valued the side events organized in the margins of the Forum of Mayor's meeting, specifically the one on "*Woman and Mayor: A Gender Perspective on Challenges and Visions for Cities*". Overall, participants found attending the Forum to be a valuable experience, emphasizing the Forum's importance for sustainable development and diplomatic engagement. Suggestions from participants on how to improve the Forum included extending the duration of the meeting for it to cover a broader range of topics, with a specific focus e.g. on women and population issues, and also allowing representation from small municipalities worldwide. Some recommended sharing lists of participants in advance and broadening the focus of the themes discussed by the Forum to include multilevel governance, stakeholder engagement, and sustainability governance. Presenting more diverse practical experiences of cities, improving the process of city selection, and issuing shared declarations were also suggested. Participants also proposed enhancing interaction and discussion opportunities, including with UN organizations and offices as well as the local (Geneva-based) private sector representatives. Additionally, extending the deadline for nominating mayors and fostering more interaction with member States were mentioned as ways to improve the Forum further;

(c) Thematic segments' roundtables received positive feedback, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.5 out of 5. Time management, diversity of perspectives, knowledge exchange and recognition of similarities in challenges across regions were highly valued by participants. To enhance the thematic segment roundtables further, the suggestions put forward included the following: increasing the participation from Arab and African countries; improving interaction and exchange of experiences among small municipalities; promoting gender balance; and allocating more time for questions from the audience;

(d) Side events were well-received, with an average satisfaction rating of 4.5 out of 5. The attendance at the various side events was well balanced;

(e) A majority of respondents (18 out of 19) expressed their intention to recommend the Forum to colleagues, and 13 indicated their intent to attend the event in 2024;

(f) As additional feedback, the participants suggested, for example, the inclusion of the Secretary General's New Agenda for Peace as a thematic segment.

V. Discussion on the format and type of interaction

10. Several suggestions and comments were made regarding the format of the Forum of Mayor's meeting, as follows:

(a) Sessions should be shorter, more focused, and not overly technical in their content. Instead, it would be important for Mayors to be able to focus on more political and strategic discussions, such as on sustainability governance;

(b) Participants showed significant interest in side-events, for example on those focusing on women and cities. One proposal was to let participants suggest side events for the following year's Forum of Mayor's meeting. Incorporating side events' themes into the plenary sessions' agenda was also proposed. Another comment highlighted the need to avoid having side events run in parallel;

(c) The advantage of holding the meeting in Geneva for maximizing the interaction with heads/representatives of the multiple international organizations based there was noted;

(d) A meeting room set up fostering interaction was found to be crucial;

(e) Interviews of mayors by a professional journalist was suggested as an innovative element that could be included into the programme;

(f) Holding more social and networking events, as well as longer coffee breaks, was seen important to facilitate interaction;

(g) Encouraging more interaction and involvement of non-mayors, civil society, non-member States, and the private sector was also proposed.

11. During the review meeting, the secretariat also updated the participants on the format and the contents of the upcoming meeting of the Forum of Mayors (Geneva, 30 September–1 October 2024):

(a) Venue and format: The 2024 meeting of the Forum of Mayors will be held as a fully in person meeting, in room XVII of the Palais des Nations, in Geneva;

(b) Theme: The Pact for the Future to be adopted by the United Nations Member States at the Summit of the Future (New York, 22–23 September 2024) will serve as a basis for the Fourth Forum of Mayors' discussions. Each session will focus on specific chapters of the Pact for the Future with Mayors being invited to share their insights on implementing the Pact's various themes. The format and focus of mayoral interventions will be communicated in advance in the invitation letters to the Mayors and provided to member States;

(c) The sessions will be moderated by the Bureau members of the Forum of Mayors. Additionally, the secretariat is following up on the suggestion to invite member States as co-facilitators to introduce the different chapters of the Pact for the Future;

(d) With a view to increasing opportunities for Mayors to interact with member States:

(i) Mayors will be invited to participate in the workshop on Housing Affordability to be held back-to-back with the Forum of Mayors, on 2 October 2024, during the eighty-fifth session of the ECE Committee on Housing, Urban Development, and Land Management;

(ii) The secretariat is exploring opportunities to organize a breakfast reception between ambassadors and mayors;

(iii) A participant also proposed extending invitations to the Forum of Mayors to National SDG Coordinators from various governments.

VI. Feedback on the theme

12. The review meeting provided feedback on the theme of the Forum of Mayors' meetings and its selection process. The secretariat explained that the Bureau of the Forum of Mayors was in charge of selecting the meetings' themes annually, in accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Forum of Mayors (ECE/EX/2023/L.4). However, the processes of determining the themes and selecting the participating cities could be adapted based on the experience gathered thus far, through a review and revision of the Terms of Reference. The secretariat will conduct a series of informal consultations with member States regarding the review of the Terms of Reference starting from April/May 2024. Ultimately, proposed revisions to the Terms of Reference will be submitted to the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land-Management at its eighty-fifth session (Geneva, 2–4 October 2024) and subsequently to the ECE Executive Committee.

13. Participants made several remarks regarding the meetings' themes:

(a) A selected theme should strike a balance between being broad and strategic enough to encompass various aspects but yet specific enough to effectively guide and structure discussions;

(b) Suggestions leaned from less strictly "urbanist" topics towards more political themes;

(c) The localization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was highlighted as one of the essential themes that takes into account mayors' expertise and political role. The secretariat acknowledged the need for increased collaboration with relevant organizations working on that topic.

14. At the review meeting, the secretariat also provided detailed explanations concerning the theme of the upcoming 2024 Forum of Mayors that the Bureau of the Forum of Mayors had selected, in accordance with the Terms of Reference of the Forum of Mayors. This year, the Bureau had opted for the theme "Cities Summit of the Future", focusing on the Pact for the Future and its ramifications and implementation at the local level.

15. Some participants at the review meeting raised concerns regarding the extent to which mayors would be familiar with the "Summit of the Future" and its Pact for the Future. Overall, it was seen important that the invitation letters to the mayors clarified expectations, ensuring that mayors understand well the specific topics they were invited to address. It was deemed important that that information be shared also with the member States.

16. The secretariat confirmed that it would provide sufficient details on the content and the format of the Forum of Mayors 2024 meeting to the mayors and to member States.

VII. Discussion on the Cities' selection process

17. The secretariat elaborated on the procedure for inviting cities to the Forum of Mayors' meeting, as outlined in the Terms of Reference of the Forum of Mayors. Then, the floor was opened for feedback from the participants to the review meeting.

18. The remarks from the participants included the following:

(a) Some participants emphasized the importance of ensuring the participation of larger and capital cities, as well as the rotation of cities in successive meetings of the Forums. The possibility to invite not only one but two cities from the same country to participate was also raised;

(b) Several participants expressed concerns regarding the shortness of the deadline of 30 days for countries to nominate cities set out in the Terms of Reference, particularly given the need for sufficient exchanges between member States and cities, including, as required, to explain the theme and the format to candidate cities beforehand;

(c) Others emphasized the importance of sending out invitations as early as possible to accommodate the busy mayoral schedules. The secretariat acknowledged that it aimed to send the invitations earlier based on lessons learned from the previous years, to

avoid that delays in responses of some selected cities would lead to missed opportunities for participation of any cities from certain countries;

(d) The need for receiving explanations on the topic of the meeting was emphasized to help guide the selection process of cities with relevant experience.

19. The secretariat recalled that the deadline for nominating cities for the 2024 meeting of the Forum, had been set for 17 February 2024. Alternatively, Member States had the option to request for additional time for holding discussions with potential cities (Note to member States of 21 February 2024). However, in absence of nominations, and any request for additional time to do so, invitations would be sent to cities as selected by the Bureau of the Forum of Mayors, with support from the secretariat, as outlined in the Terms of Reference. As had been suggested, the secretariat would also copy the (Geneva-based) permanent missions of ECE member States to the United Nations and other international organizations when sending invitation letters to mayors. The secretariat agreed that, after the review meeting, it would send another note to all ECE Member States with details on the selection process as well as the content and the format of the upcoming Forum of Mayors

20. Lastly, the secretariat explained that proposals for nominations of mayors from outside the ECE region were recommended by other United Nations Regional Commissions (Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). As a result, 2 to 3 recommended cities per region would be invited.
