

Evaluation Survey of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region 2019

Results

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 2019 (Geneva, 21-22 March 2019) on 22 March 2019. It remained open until 28 April 2019.

During this period, 103 responses were received (out of a total of 854 registered participants). Most of the responses came from representatives of UNECE governments (21.4 per cent) and non-governmental organizations (36.9 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	21.4	22
UN department, fund, programme, specialized agency or related organization	13.6	14
Intergovernmental and regional organization	12.6	13
Non-governmental organization	36.9	38
Private sector	1.9	2
Academia	4.8	5
Others (please specify)	8.7	9
Total	100	103

The governments who participated in the survey are Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Kazakhstan, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. Responses were received by more than one participant in a number of cases.

Most respondents participated in the high-level policy segment in the first day and, in lower numbers, in the *Connecting the dots* plenary session in the second day. The most attended round table was, by large, the one on *Learning without Limits - Lifelong Learning and Inclusive Education*, where 30.1 per cent of the respondents participated. Side events proved popular, as almost two thirds of 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)	84.5	87
Focus event: Technology, Digitalization, Artificial Intelligence – Curse or Blessing for Sustainable Development? (second day)	27.2	28
Focus event: How to Measure Progress? Data and Statistics for SDGs (second day)	30.1	31
Connecting the dots. Plenary session (second day)	69.9	72
Round table: Learning without Limits - Lifelong Learning and Inclusive Education	30.1	31
Round table: The Power of Knowledge for Change - Education and Learning as Drivers of Sustainable Development	11.7	12
Round table: The Growth We Want - Solutions for Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth	11.7	12
Round table: The Future of Work - Productive Employment and Decent Work for All	13.6	14
Round table: Bridging the Gap - Achieving Greater Income and Economic Equality	4.9	5
Round table: Towards a World of Equal Opportunity - Tackling inequality caused by exclusion and discrimination	14.6	15
Round table: Acting for Climate - Stepping Up Climate Change Policies, Action and Awareness in the Region	9.7	10
Round table: Coping with Climate Change - Strengthening Resilience and Adaptation	10.7	11
Round table: Strengthening Institutions for Change - Fostering Effective and Inclusive Governance for Sustainable Development	12.6	13
Round table: Empowering People to Protect the Planet - The Environmental Dimension of SDG 16	7.8	8
Side events	61.2	63
Total Respondents	100	103

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	1.0 (1)	4.9 (5)	24.3 (25)	37.9 (39)	32.0 (33)	100 (103)
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	2.9 (3)	8.7 (9)	34.0 (35)	31.1 (32)	23.3 (24)	100 (103)
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	2.9 (3)	10.7 (11)	22.3 (23)	35.9 (37)	28.2 (29)	100 (103)

Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	2.9 (3)	10.7 (11)	20.4 (21)	31.1 (32)	35.0 (36)	100 (103)
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	2.9 (3)	13.6 (14)	34.0 (35)	32.0 (33)	17.5 (19)	100 (103)

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 discussions at the Forum were assessed as highly relevant to the work area or expertise of participants: 69.9 per cent considered them very or extremely useful while only 5.8 per cent thought that they were not or just somewhat useful. The Forum was particularly well perceived as providing an opportunity to establish new and useful contacts: 66 per cent of respondents considered that it was very or extremely useful on this regard while only 13.6 per cent thought that was not or just somewhat useful. The Forum was also well received in relation to the exchange of information and sharing of experience with other participants. By contrast, the assessment of the contribution of the Forum to the identification of good practices and useful experiences was less positive, as it was the area with the smallest positive difference between more favourable and less favourable responses: 49.5 per cent of respondents considered that the Forum was very or extremely useful on this regard while 16.5 per cent thought that it was not or somewhat useful.

The assessment provided by UNECE governments (table 4), is rather similar, although there are some differences. Generally speaking, 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 33.0 per cent for the whole set of respondents, increasing to 45.5 per cent when only governments are considered. Government representatives were more appreciative of the role of the Forum as a provider of knowledge and information for future work: 68.2 per cent considered that it was very or extremely useful, when only 9.1 per cent thought it was not or somewhat useful.

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	0.0 (0)	4.6 (1)	18.2 (4)	40.9 (9)	36.4 (8)	100 (22)
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	0.0 (0)	9.1 (2)	22.7 (5)	50.0 (11)	18.2 (4)	100 (22)
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	0.0 (0)	18.2 (4)	13.6 (8)	36.4 (7)	31.8 (14)	100 (22)
Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	0.0 (0)	13.6 (3)	18.2 (4)	40.9 (9)	27.3 (6)	100 (22)
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	0.0 (0)	13.6 (3)	27.3 (6)	40.9 (9)	18.2 (4)	100 (22)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

UNECE member States have repeatedly expressed the importance they attach to peer-learning in the Forum, so the questionnaire includes a separate question on this aspect. 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	4.7 (9)	7.3 (14)	32.3 (62)	39.1 (75)	16.7 (32)	100 (192)
Organisation of the discussions	5.2 (10)	9.9 (19)	28.8 (55)	38.7 (74)	17.3 (33)	100 (191)
Case studies presented	4.7 (9)	7.9 (15)	32.5 (62)	39.8 (76)	15.2 (29)	100 (191)
Time management	3.7 (7)	9.0 (17)	30.2 (57)	30.7 (58)	26.5 (50)	100 (189)

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 55.7 of responses assessing the peer-learning experience as very good or excellent and only 12 per cent considering that it was poor or needed improvement. Time management attracted the highest positive and negative marks, but, in balance, the difference between both, at 44.4 per cent, was the highest. This was a marked difference in relation to last year's survey, where time management received the most critical responses. Overall, the assessments have been fairly similar across the different aspects. The organisation of the discussions received the worst marks, with the highest share of respondents considering it poor or in need of improvement (15.2 per cent of participants) and the lowest difference between positive (very good or excellent) and negative (poor, needs improvement) assessments, at 40.8 per cent.

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, 64.3 per cent of responses considered that the peer-learning experience was very good or excellent, against only 9.5 that assessed it as poor or in need of improvement. Time management is the best performing aspect, while the case studies presented received a particularly bad mark: 16.7 per cent of the responses considered that they were 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	4.8 (2)	4.8 (2)	26.2 (11)	50.0 (21)	14.3 (6)	100 (42)
Organisation of the discussions	4.8 (2)	7.1 (3)	26.2 (11)	40.5 (17)	21.4 (9)	100 (42)
Case studies presented	4.8 (2)	11.9 (5)	23.8 (10)	42.9 (18)	16.7 (7)	100 (42)
Time management	4.8 (2)	9.5 (4)	19.0 (8)	33.3 (14)	33.3 (14)	100 (42)

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	2.9 (3)	12.6 (13)	19.4 (20)	40.8 (42)	24.3 (25)	100 (103)
Structure of the Forum	3.9 (4)	8.7 (9)	25.2 (26)	37.9 (39)	24.3 (25)	100 (103)
Documentation	2.9 (3)	10.7 (11)	35.9 (37)	29.1 (30)	21.4 (22)	100 (103)
Communication with participants prior to the event	4.9 (5)	10.7 (11)	28.2 (29)	24.3 (25)	32.0 (33)	100 (103)
Organizational arrangements for and during the event	3.9 (4)	8.7 (9)	23.3 (24)	35.0 (36)	29.1 (30)	100 (103)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The organizational arrangements for and during the event were the most appreciated aspect (64.1 per cent of respondents thought that they were excellent or very good, while only 12.6 per cent considered that they were poor or needed improvement). The programme of the Forum also scored highly (65.1 per cent of respondents considered that was very good or excellent) but, at the same time, it attracted one of the

largest shares of negative assessments (15.5 per cent expressed the opinion that it was poor or needed improvement). This ranking is in line with was observed last year.

By contrast, comparatively less favourable assessments were received regarding documentation (50.5 per cent of respondents stated that it was excellent or very good, while 13.6 per cent considered it poor or needing improvement) and communication with participants prior to the event (56.3 per cent and 15.5 per cent, in the same classification).

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 programme and the organizational arrangements of the meeting are the areas that receive higher marks. However, the more positive assessment of the programme is offset by a relative high share of participants that considered that it was poor needed improvement. As a result, both aspects- programme and organizational arrangements- show the same difference between the positive and negative assessments, which at 63.6 per cent, is the highest value observed among the different areas. By contrast, the balance of positive and negative answers for communication with participants is only 45.5 per cent, resulting from a relatively low level of positive answers and a high share of negative answers.

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)	9.1 (2)	18.2 (4)	54.6 (12)	18.2 (4)	100 (22)
Structure of the Forum (plenary and parallel round tables)	0.0 (0)	4.6 (1)	36.4 (8)	40.9 (9)	18.2 (4)	100 (22)
Documentation	0.0 (0)	9.1 (2)	27.3 (6)	50.0 (11)	13.6 (3)	100 (22)
Communication with participants prior to the event	0.0 (0)	9.1 (2)	36.4 (8)	31.8 (7)	22.7 (5)	100 (22)
Organizational arrangements for and during the event	0.0 (0)	4.6 (1)	27.3 (6)	50.0 (11)	18.2 (4)	100 (22)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

The overall assessment of the event was very positive (table 9), with 42.7 per cent of respondents considering that it was excellent and 33.0 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	8.8 (9)	4.5 (1)
Adequate	15.5 (16)	13.6 (3)
Good	42.7 (44)	40.9 (9)
Excellent	33.0 (34)	40.9 (9)
Total	100 (103)	100 (22)

Note: Absolute numbers in brackets.

An overwhelming share of respondents (77.8 per cent) would recommend that other experts from their countries or organizations attend similar events in the future, while 19.4 per cent may consider such a possibility. Only one respondent declined making such a recommendation. Government responses show an even more positive assessment: while 81.8 per cent of respondents would recommend future participation, 18.2 per cent were not completely sure. No government representative gave a firm recommendation not to participate.

In their comments, respondents explained some of the reasons for their assessment. The Forum gives opportunities to network, exchange experiences, brainstorm and influence policymakers. The broad array of topics considered gave a good overview of the SDG situation in many areas from different perspectives. The venue of the Forum made possible the organisation of multiple events. The diversity of topics considered was appreciated by some while, according to others, such a rich programme did not offer the appropriate focus for more in-depth discussions. Some respondents considered that the room for dialogue is still insufficient and that the format remains too rigid to accommodate more spontaneous interaction. There is no space for a structured, genuine dialogue between governments and civil society. Despite some improvements, accessibility problems remain.

3. Suggestions for the future

There were a number of suggestions for future work. As in previous assessments, many participants remain concerned on how to make the event more interactive. Most of the comments came from representatives from civil society organizations, who continued to advocate for a more visible and structured role for their participation.

Some specific suggestions that were raised by particular individuals concerning:

a) Focus

- Reduce and enforce speaking times in order to improve focus and leave more time for interaction.
- Increase the length of the Forum to at least two full days
- More prominent role to innovation across the different topics considered

- Develop a more regional focus, connecting with topical policy issues in the region
- Include more disaster-related work
- Reduce the number of parallel sessions or increase the length of the Forum
- Give more visibility to the contribution of civil society in the documentation produced, included the report of the meeting

b) Partnerships and networking

- Encourage member States to organise events at home in preparation for the Forum
- Give governments more access to information provided by academia and civil society, through poster sessions or presentations
- Introduce a speaker's corner for spontaneous opinions and views from participants.
- Increase the space for interventions from Major Groups and other stakeholders.
- Develop a programme to engage local civil society organisations
- Bring artist groups from the region that work in different ways on SDGs

c) Organizational and logistic aspects

- Develop an application to handle various organizational and logistic aspects
- Contribute to sustainability in practice – no plastic bottles or glasses allowed; better dietary choices.
- Increase the time breaks between events
- Introduce a registration procedure for side events
- Improve accessibility for persons with disabilities
- Allow registration at the venue, not at a separated facility

Suggestions on how to improve peer-learning at the Forum, remained focussed, as in the past, on how to facilitate interaction and more in-depth discussions. Some ideas proposed by particular individuals concerned:

- Experiment with new formats that facilitate interaction (hackathon, fishbowl...)
- Create task groups to propose solutions to the challenges discussed at the peer-learning round tables
- Smaller number of participants and/or more time
- Reduce the number of SDGs discussed

- Share more materials before the event
- Develop a specific application to facilitate the learning experience
- Facilitate that participants know each other before the meeting
- Use more case studies from academia and civil society
- Case studies should be more closely related to a particular policy issue (less dispersion)

As for the substantive topics to be considered in future editions of the Forum, some specific topics were proposed:

- Climate change
- Increased emphasis on current policy issues that are in the general domain
- Intra-regional trade
- More focus on persons with disabilities
- Role of municipalities on SDGs
- SDG 5 could become the focus of the 2020 Forum, in view of Beijing+25
- Special event on exchanging VNR best practices in smaller groups
- Governance for sustainability
- Empowerment, inclusion and inequality
- Food and agricultural systems.