



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
28 January 2021

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Sixty-ninth session

Geneva, 20 and 21 April 2021

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

**Other issues calling for decision by the Commission**

## Evaluation of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

### Note by the Secretariat

#### I. Introduction, scope and methodology

##### A. Introduction

1. This note has been prepared to fulfil the request made by Decision B (68) of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) requesting “*the secretariat to prepare in 2021 an evaluation of the added value of the Regional Forum for ECE member States so far and identify possible improvements*”. The evaluation will cover the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development for the ECE region organized in 2018, 2019 and 2020, following the establishment of the Regional Forum by Decision B (67) of the ECE in 2017.

##### B. Scope

2. Decision B (67) defines the mandate, focus and format of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the ECE Region (RFSD) as follows:

(a) the RFSD is established “as a regional mechanism to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”,

(b) it is convened “in close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system”.

3. The RFSD will “focus on practical value added, taking into account the work of existing regional bodies and mechanisms, including peer review mechanisms, while avoiding additional reporting burdens for member States, and contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by:

(a) creating a space for ECE member States for peer learning and the exchange of policy experiences and good practices in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

(b) providing a regional and sub-regional overview of progress and challenges in implementation that would complement analogous reports at the global level;

(c) enhancing regional and sub-regional cooperation and addressing transboundary issues;

(d) providing a platform for the participation and contributions of all relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organizations, civil society, academia and



the private sector, following the relevant provisions of the 2030 Agenda and the corresponding decisions of the Economic and Social Council”.

4. In addition, Decision B (67) requested the secretariat to develop the agenda of each Forum “with a focus on those aspects that are particularly relevant to the ECE region, and taking into account lessons learnt from previous regional forums. It was also decided “to submit the outcome of the Regional Forum, in the form of a summary produced by its Chair, to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), as part of the regional contributions to the global follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.

5. On the basis of this decision, the evaluation will consider the relevance and impact of the RFSD by addressing three groups of questions:

**(a) RFSD as a valued and participative multi-stakeholder platform supported by the engagement of the regional United Nations system**

- Has the RFSD emerged as a broad and valued platform to engage member States on practical discussions on sustainable development in the ECE region?
- Are the entities of the regional United Nations system closely engaged in the preparation of the annual RFSD?
- Has the RFSD provided an effective platform for the participation of all relevant stakeholders?

**(b) Content and organization of the discussions**

- Has the agenda of each RFSD been prepared to reflect issues of particular interest to the region?
- Has the RFSD contributed to enhance sub-regional cooperation and addressed transboundary issues?
- Has the RFSD provided elements for the assessment of regional and sub-regional progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
- Have the RFSDs evolved to take into account the lessons derived from previous RFSDs?
- Is the role of the RFSD as a space for peer learning and the exchange of policy experiences appreciated and supported by member States?

**(c) Outputs and its use**

- How has the mandated Chair’s summary been prepared? How have the outcomes of the RFSD been presented at the global level?

6. Regarding the **efficiency** of the RFSD, the evaluation will look at the resources used for the RFSD in comparison with the results obtained. In addition, it will also consider the stability of existing resources.

7. After presenting and assessing the evidence available, the evaluation will offer some **conclusions and present possible options for future improvement**. As requested by member States, the visibility and impact of Regional Forums in the HLPF and implications of the ongoing HLPF review; the challenges and opportunities of physical versus virtual meeting formats and the potential linkages with the Forum of Mayors and SDG implementation at the local level would be considered when exploring proposals for the future development of the RFSD.

## **C. Methodology**

8. The evaluation will be based on the responses provided by government participants to the evaluation surveys circulated after each annual RFSD and other available evidence, including RFSD reports and programmes, data on participation and project documents submitted to the Executive Committee (EXCOM). Proposals for improvements will also reflect the experiences from Regional Forums in other regions. A comparative table on these experiences is contained in the annex to this note.

## II. Taking stock of past Regional Forums on Sustainable Development

### A. Assessing the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development as a valued and participative multi-stakeholder platform supported by the engagement of the regional United Nations system

#### 1. Regional Forum on Sustainable Development as a valued multi-stakeholder platform

9. Participation in the RFSDs has been broad and diverse, with a marked increase in the total number of registered participants between 2018 and 2019, raising from 652 to 855 (31 per cent), and an even stronger increase since the first RFSD session in 2017, which preceded Decision B (67), with 383 participants. Representatives from ECE member States increased from 230 to 270 between 2018 and 2019 (17 per cent). An analysis of media coverage, including social media, indicated that the potential reach of the event in 2019 was a significant 2.2 million people.

10. Table 1 presents a breakdown of the composition of registered participants, which shows the increased engagement of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations system with the Regional Forum. While the higher participation of these actors explains most of the growth in the number of registered participants between 2018 and 2019, it must be noted that the number of government delegates continued to increase as well.

11. Comparisons with 2020 are not possible, as the COVID-19 pandemic forced a quick change of format, which included a much shorter programme and the possibility of remote participation only. There is no detailed data on participation but interest on the RFSD remained strong. Existing online capacity of up to 300 participants was fully exhausted. This was the first virtual meeting conducted by ECE in these new and difficult conditions.

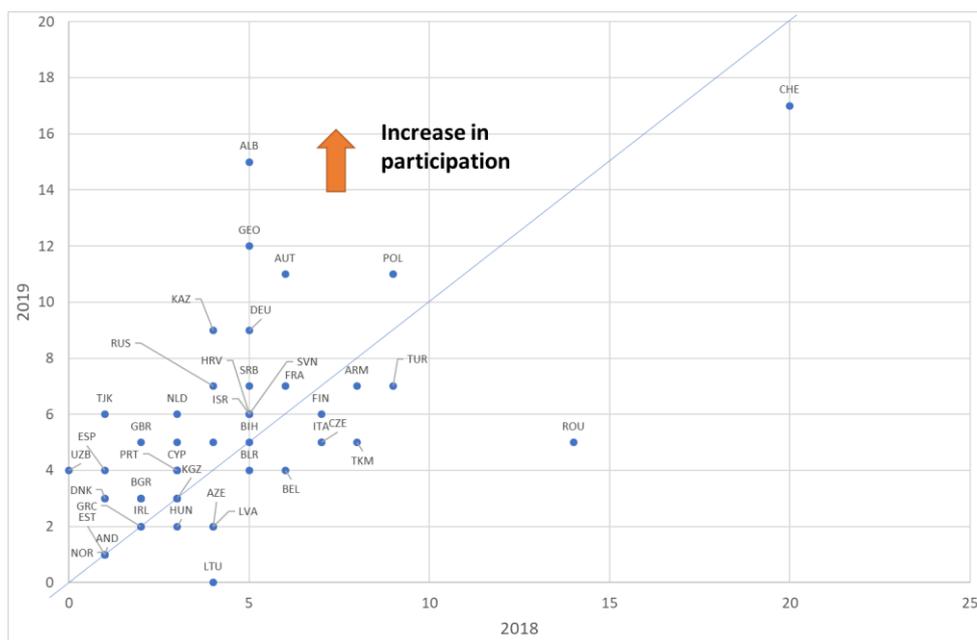
Table 1  
Composition of registered participants, percentages

	2018	2019
Total	100	100
Governments	36.2	32.2
Intergovernmental organizations	4.6	4.9
NGO sector	21.9	28.9
Private	2.9	1.3
Academia	5.4	3.6
UN organizations	12.7	21.9
Others	16.3	7.3

*Note:* In this table, governments include also EU delegates. UN organizations do not include ECE secretariat.

12. In both 2018 and 2019, the RFSD was attended by representatives of 51 ECE member States. The median size of member States delegations increased from 4.0 to 4.5 over these two years. The number of countries that increased the size of the delegations was twice the number of those who reduced it, sometimes from a very high level (Chart 1), while 10 countries maintained the size of their delegations unchanged.

Chart 1  
**Number of government delegates participating per member State, 2018-2019**



13. Relatively large sizes of the delegations and their composition reflect the varied thematic issues and formats for participation, ranging from high-level cross-sectoral policy discussions to more focused peer learning events.

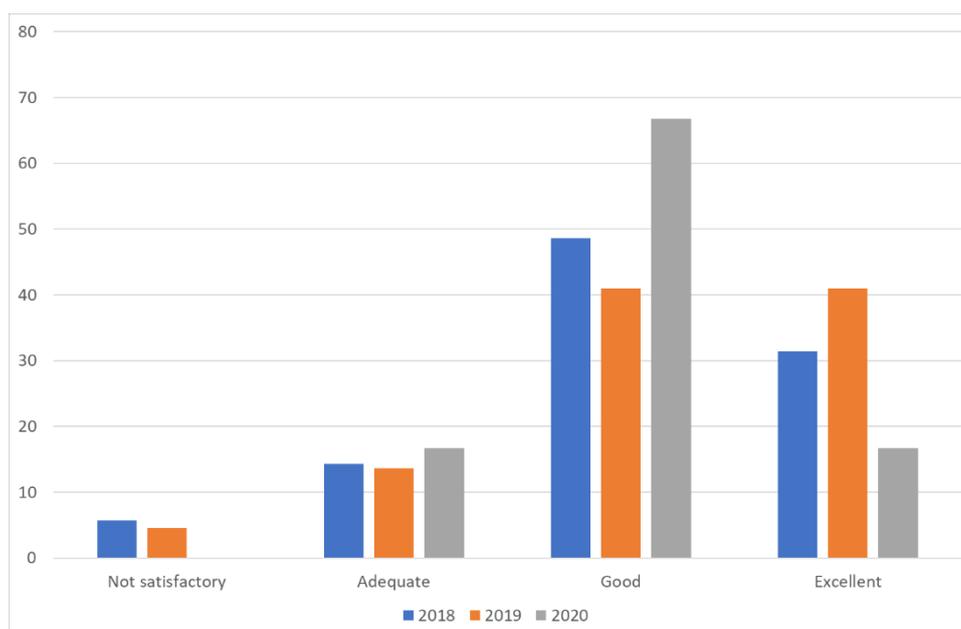
14. The increased value attached by multiple stakeholders to the RFSD as platform to engage with the sustainable development community can be seen in the dynamics of side events as well. The number of side events sponsored by individual member States and other organizations doubled between 2018 and 2019 to reach 18. In 2020, despite the disruption created by the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 4 side events.

15. The positive assessment of the RFSDs implicit in these participation and organizational trends is confirmed by the results of the surveys that were circulated among participants after each meeting to gauge their views on different issues<sup>1</sup>. In 2020, the scope of the assessment changed, due to the virtual format required by the COVID-19 crisis. Given changes in the format and overall participation, the results of the survey in 2020 are not strictly comparable with those of previous years.

16. The overall assessment of the RFSD by government participants was positive in 2018 and 2019, with a clear shift towards those that consider it as excellent. In 2020, while the percentage of negative assessments declined – nobody considered the RFSD as not satisfactory, there was a reverse shift from “excellent” to “good” (Chart 2).

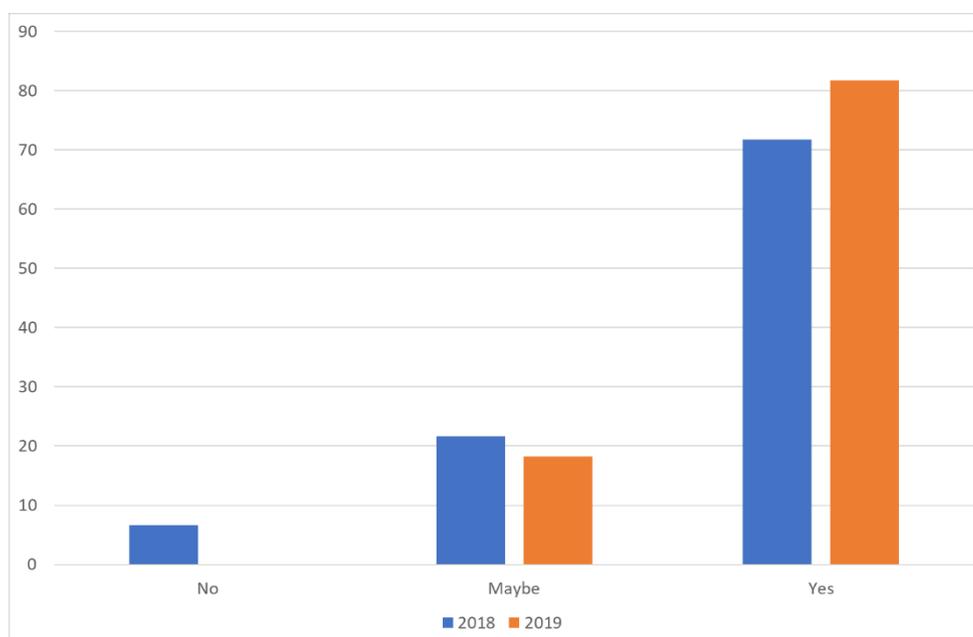
<sup>1</sup> The results of the evaluation surveys of the Regional Forums 2018-2020 are available at the respective hyperlinks: [2018](#), [2019](#), and [2020](#).

Chart 2

**Overall assessment by government delegates of the RFSDs, percentages**

17. The question on future participation was only asked in 2018 and 2019, given the exceptional circumstances of the 2020 RFSD. An overwhelming majority would have recommended participation in 2018. This percentage increased by 10 percentage points in 2019 while no answers were received ruling out this recommendation (Chart 3).

Chart 3

**Recommendations on future participation by government delegates, percentages**

## 2. Involvement of United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations, conventions and initiatives

18. The RFSDs have been organized in close cooperation with the regional United Nations system, in particular regarding the peer learning segment. This reflects the request in Decision B (67) to convene the Forum in “close cooperation with the entities of the regional United Nations system”. The collaboration included the design of the programme, the mobilization of participants and speakers, the provision of resource persons and the implementation of practical organizational arrangements. The engagement of the regional

United Nations system has increased. In 2018, four of the ten peer learning roundtables were co-organized by regional United Nations entities. In 2019, this model of collaboration was extended further and used in the organization of all focus events and round tables. Round tables had typically one or two lead organizers and were supported by the collaboration of three to four participating agencies.

19. Altogether, 29 United Nations departments, funds and programmes, specialized agencies, related organizations, conventions and initiatives participated in the RFSD in 2018, increasing to 36 in 2019. The prominent role of the RFSD as an all-inclusive platform on regional sustainable development was enhanced further by the participation of United Nations Resident Coordinators of 13 programme countries in 2019.

### **3. Involvement of civil society and other stakeholders**

20. Civil society organizations have met every year on the margins of the RFSD and reported the conclusions of their discussions to the RFSD, thus supporting the request contained in Decision B (67) to “provide a platform for the participation of all stakeholders”. A Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism, owned and driven by civil society organizations, has emerged as a platform to enable stronger cross constituency coordination covering five subregions in ECE and fourteen different constituencies. Civil society representatives nominated through the coordination mechanism have also brought their views and policy examples into the peer learning discussions. In 2019, a pre-meeting of youth took place, bringing together young people from the region to discuss the SDGs under review based on an online consultation distributed ahead of the meeting. In addition, a regional consultation on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda was organized before the RFSD. Briefings on both pre-meetings were presented to the plenary session of the RFSD.

21. In 2020, a first-ever SDG business dialogue had been in an advanced stage of preparation, led by United Nations Global Compact and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). It could, however, not take place due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic but enabled the business sector to contribute its perspective to the virtual discussion at the 2020 RFSD.

## **B. Content and organization of the discussions**

22. The agenda of the RFSD has been prepared through close consultations with member States and partners in the United Nations system. While being aligned with the overall discussions at the HLPF, these close consultations have ensured that the topics under consideration reflect issues that are of particular interest to the region.

23. The focus of the RFSDs has been on voluntary peer learning and sharing of experiences, practical solutions and challenges in implementing the SDGs among governments and other stakeholders.

24. The structure of the RFSD in 2018 and 2019 was designed to facilitate these aims, including a high-level policy segment, a peer learning segment with a number of parallel round tables and a final concluding session focusing on linkages between different SDGs. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the structure was simplified and there was no separate peer learning segment.

25. Transboundary aspects have been raised in the policy exchanges that have taken place in the RFSD, as reflected in the Chair’s summaries included in the reports of the RFSDs. These transboundary considerations have been paramount regarding environmental issues, such as water, biodiversity (2018), climate change and public participation (2019). Sub-regional organizations have participated in the RFSD, adding to the diversity of experiences under discussion. They have also organized side events with a particular subregional focus.

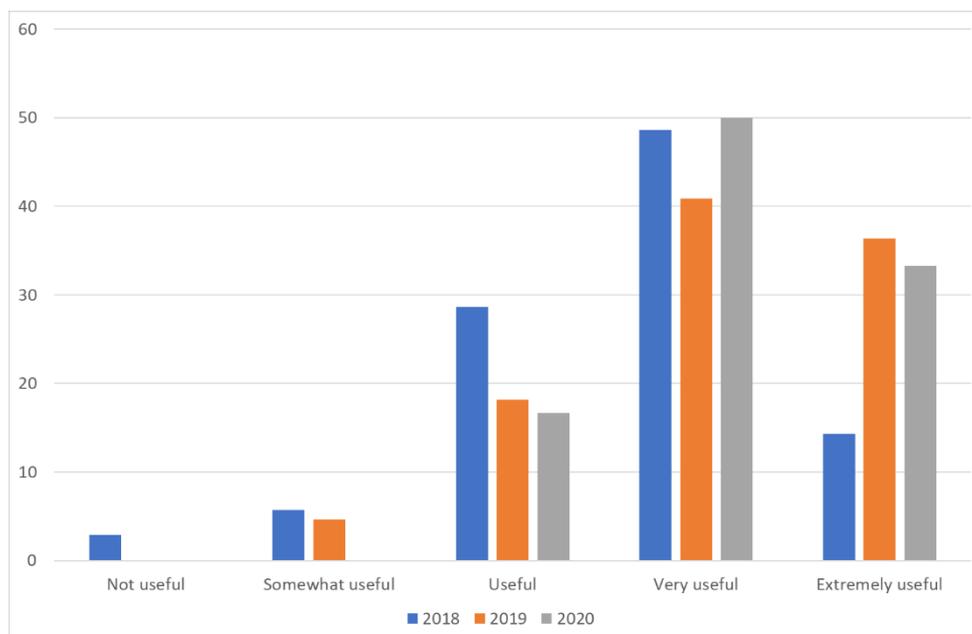
26. Exchanges at the various segments have provided an opportunity to hear multiple perspectives and national experiences on the progress and challenges in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In 2018, a snapshot of the situation in the region regarding the SDGs under discussion was provided to the RFSD. In 2019, a comprehensive statistical report on

SDG implementation in the region was launched, in accordance with the request made in Decision B (68).

27. Discussions at the RFSD have been considered as highly relevant, as reflected in survey results and the reports of the meetings. The assessment of the significance of the issues considered by government delegates has shown an improving trend, with an increasing percentage of respondents who considered the RFSD very useful or extremely useful (chart 4).

Chart 4

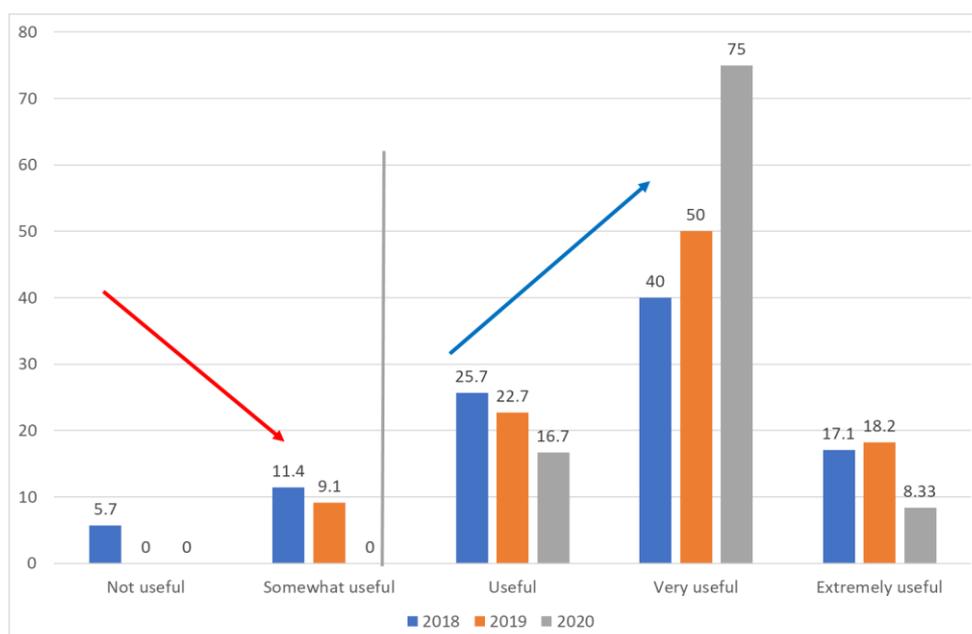
**Assessment of the significance of the issues by government delegates, percentages**



28. A similar dynamic can be observed regarding the contribution of the RFSD to obtain relevant knowledge and information (chart 5).

Chart 5

**Assessment of the Forums as a source of knowledge and information by government delegates, percentages**



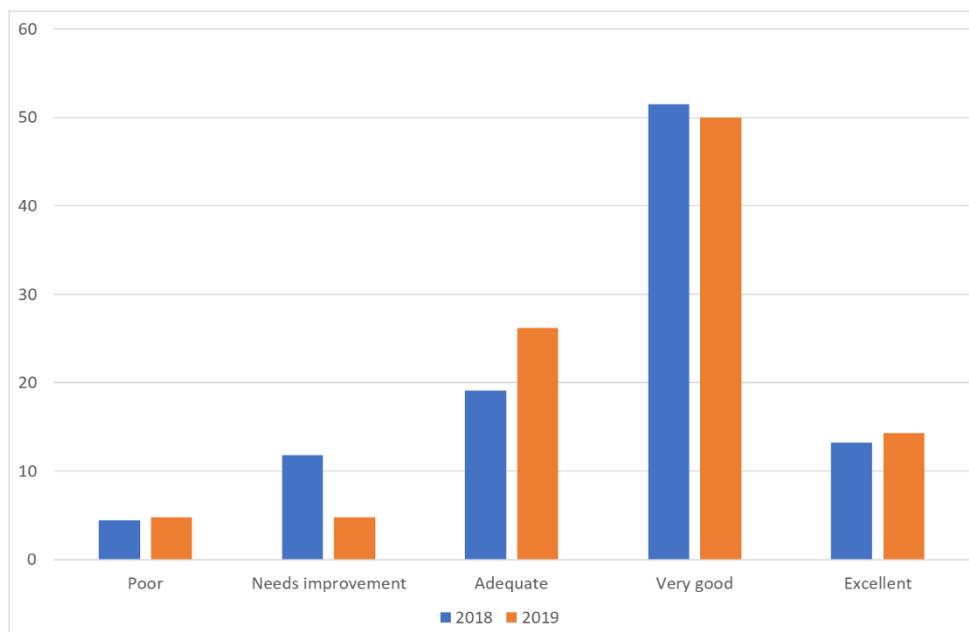
29. In 2018 and 2019, ten round tables took place as part of the peer learning segment; two per each of the five SDGs under in-depth review at the annual High-level Political Forum. In order to facilitate the discussion and provide a stronger focus on peer learning, a number of policy case studies were collected and distributed before the meetings.

30. Changes in the format of the RFSD were introduced to reflect previous experiences but also to react to unexpected circumstances. As an innovation, the 2019 RFSD included also two focus events (on technology, digitalization and artificial intelligence and on the measurement of progress). The aim of this change of format, which was positively received by participants, was double: to facilitate a broader discussion on cross-sectoral topics that are highly relevant for SDG implementation and to provide an alternative outlet for engagement to those participants that could not attend the round tables of the peer learning segment. The numbers of participants at the round tables had been limited, with preference given to delegates from member States, in order to facilitate the discussions. In 2020, the COVID-19 crisis forced the quick adoption of a virtual format, which is being explored at the 2021 RFSD as offering new possibilities to increase the impact and reach of the RFSD.

31. The surveys circulated at the end of each RFSD show that the overall assessment of the peer learning segment by government participants was positive and improved further between 2018 and 2019 (chart 6). There was no separate peer learning segment in 2020. There are, however, some aspects that could be improved further.

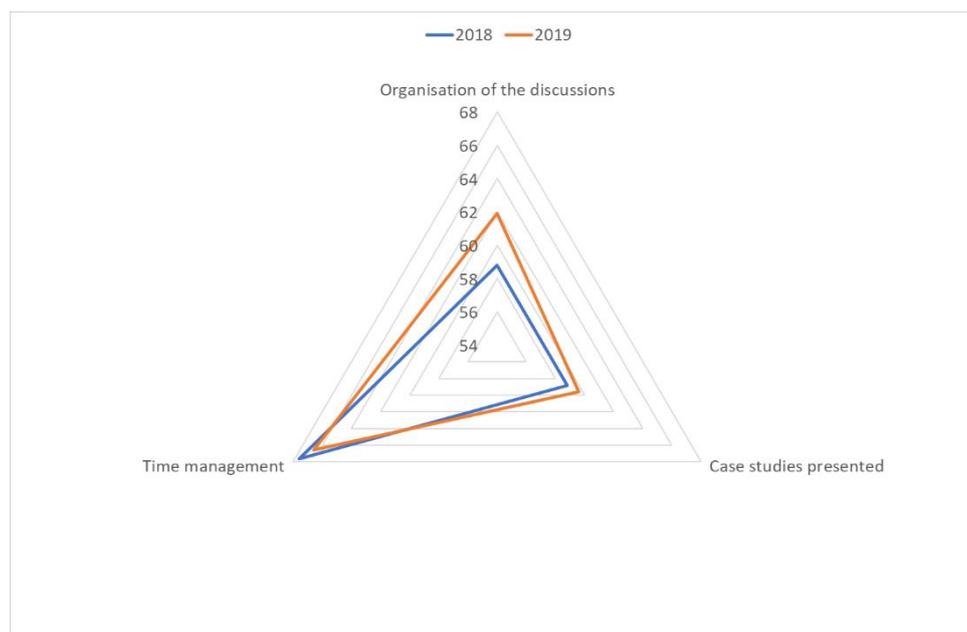
Chart 6

**Overall assessment of peer learning by government delegates, percentages**



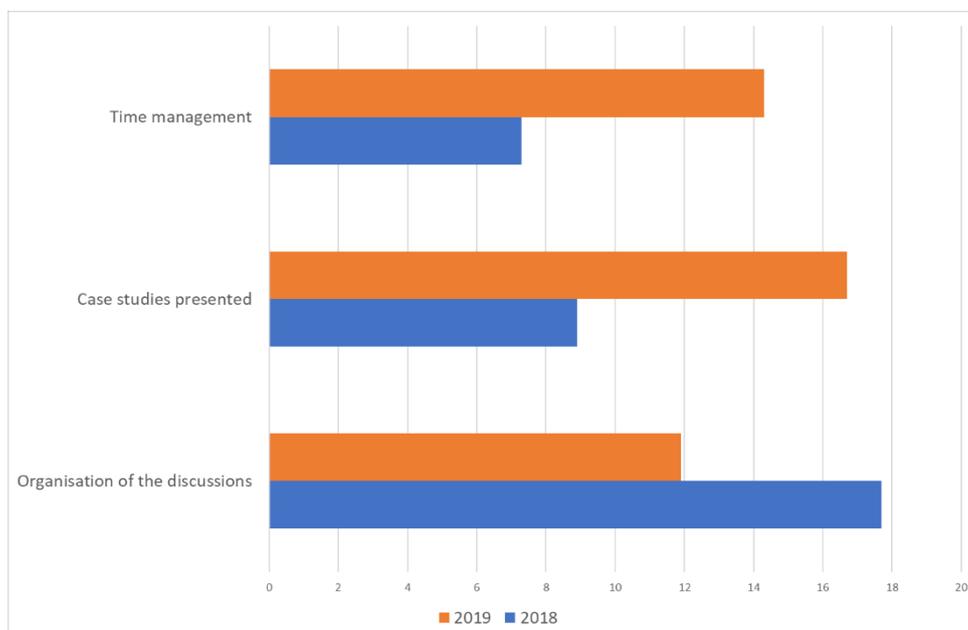
32. Looking at different aspects of the peer learning discussions, the improvement between 2018 and 2019 was more marked regarding the organization of the discussions, where the score received in 2018 was moderate. Time management deteriorated marginally between 2018 and 2019, but this remained the best performing area in both years (chart 7).

Chart 7

**Peer learning assessment by government delegates, very good or excellent, percentages**

33. Focusing the attention on the negative scores (poor or in need of improvement), the progress regarding the organization of the discussions is clearly confirmed, as the percentage of negative answers declined. The assessment of case studies presented became more negative, as 17 per cent of government respondents considered that they were poor or in need of improvement, up from an already relatively high 9 per cent in 2018 (chart 8).

Chart 8

**Peer learning assessment by government delegates, poor or in need of improvement, percentages**

### **C. Outputs of the Forum and its use**

34. A Chair's summary reflecting the discussions has been prepared each year through a consultative process that has given an opportunity to member States to submit changes to the draft reports as well as to all other participants to express their views on the drafts. The summary was finally issued under the authority of the Chair and submitted on time to the HLPF each year. The Chairs of the RFSD reported at the HLPF regional assessments on SDG progress and the outcomes of the Forums based on these summaries. In addition, the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions have been invited in more recent HLPFs to intervene in thematic sessions, providing an opportunity to feed in selected key messages from the regional discussions.

### **D. A precarious resource base**

35. The RFSD has been serviced by the ECE Sustainable Development and Gender Unit. Extra-budgetary resources have been raised to finance travel of participants, interpretation and other costs, as detailed in the two extra-budgetary projects presented to EXCOM (Informal Documents 2017/60 Rev.1 for 2018–2019 and 2019/52/Rev.1 for 2020–2021). Financial contributions to the RFSDs in 2018–2020 were provided by the Russian Federation and Switzerland. In addition to the expenditures and contributions identified in these documents, Switzerland covered the costs of using the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG), which was critical to accommodate a large number of participants and multiple parallel sessions and side events.

36. According to these project documents, the preparation of the annual RFSD has absorbed regular budget staff resources equivalent to one month of a D1, 1.5 months of a P5 and 2.5 months of a P4. In addition to these resources, 10 months of a JPO provided by Germany were dedicated to the preparation of the RFSD and related activities.

37. The JPO contract will expire in November 2021. If no financial means become available to keep the respective staff in the Unit, the capacities of the Unit to service the RFSD and to explore new options to extend its reach and impact, as detailed in part III of this note, would be significantly reduced.

## **III. Options and recommendations for improvement of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

38. Despite the high rates of overall approval by participants, there are some areas which could be improved, including by exploring options that have been raised in the qualitative responses to the surveys circulated earlier and other feedback received by member States.

39. The comparative experience offered by the RFSDs organized by other regional commissions also offered some insights on potential changes in the format and other aspects of the RFSD.

40. There are five change areas that have been identified in this evaluation that seek to address existing weaknesses or increase further the impact of the RFSD. The possible options discussed for these areas are sometimes interrelated. In particular, a change in format with the use of virtual elements opens the door to new forms of engagement, both regarding the scope of coverage and the partners involved.

### **A. Facilitating in-depth discussions and the use of virtual elements**

41. Thematic variety has added to the overall value of the RFSD, as acknowledged by participants. However, the trade-off between the wide coverage of issues and the ability to have focused, in-depth discussions has been noted. The success of the RFSD in attracting large numbers of participants also created a new challenge, as it became more difficult to organize meaningful and engaging discussions.

42. The 2019 RFSD saw a change in the structure of the programme to provide alternative outlets for participation that reduced the number of those engaged in peer learning round tables, where preference was given to government delegates. While this change was positively received, the challenge remains to increase interactivity and have in-depth discussions while covering multiple topics and attracting large numbers of participants.

43. The combination of virtual segments with physical sessions may provide a way to facilitate more interactivity in smaller groups and the coverage of multiple topics, in addition to the experimentation with new formats that facilitate interaction, as suggested by some participants.

## **B. Alternative formats of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**

44. The current format of the RFSD, with the exception of 2020, envisaged a number of plenary and parallel meetings spread over one day and a half. In addition, side events outside the official programme have also taken place, as described earlier.

45. This format has facilitated the gathering of a very large number of participants over a reduced period of time, which is much shorter than the time allocated to RFSDs organized by other Regional Economic Commissions, which extend over 3-4 full days. While this is conducive to networking, it has created strong logistical and organizational demands and limited the time for discussions. The question of time constraints for the discussions has been raised by participants in their responses to the surveys.

46. An alternative would be to envisage a format where the physical RFSD could be the culmination of a process that has developed over the preceding months, incorporating a limited number of different events. The RFSD could provide an umbrella for other activities, in particular dedicated preparatory consultations, which would facilitate more focused discussions across a large number of topics. In addition, the organization of sub-regional events that consider matters of particular interest for a group of countries would also be an option to explore, as it could contribute to more diverse and relevant exchanges. The existence of subregional offices opens possibilities for other Regional Economic Commissions for the organization of subregional events that are not available to ECE, given its different structure. Building on the experience of the 2020 virtual RFSD, some of these activities could take place using fully virtual formats.

47. A combination of fully virtual and hybrid sessions is envisaged for the 2021 RFSD, but it will in the end depend on the pandemic situation in spring 2021.

## **C. Developing and strengthening partnerships**

48. A view of the RFSD as a process that offers multiple entry points for engagement rather than an annual event could also serve to develop partnerships with the private sector, which is an issue that often emerges in the comments received from participants. It could also facilitate reaching out to a large range of stakeholders, including subnational levels of government. One potential avenue to explore in this regard would be the relations with the ECE Forum of Mayors, which may provide an additional channel to provide a local perspective on SDG implementation. The RFSD could also reach out to subregional organizations that may engage with their members in discussions that could feed into the overall architecture of the RFSD. United Nations Resident Coordinators are invited and participate in the RFSD, but closer collaboration could be envisaged, in particular when a Voluntary National Review of a programme country is under preparation. Science and academia could be involved more continuously with regard to the latest evidence regarding sustainable development trends and challenges in the region.

## **D. Background documentation and other preparatory materials**

49. Case studies have been collected from participants in round tables to support the discussions in 2018 and 2019. However, responses to the surveys circulated after the RFSD showed that this is an area where there is room for improvement.

50. In 2019, a short snapshot of the situation in the region regarding the SDGs under discussion was prepared. In 2020, in response to the Decision B (68) of the Economic Commission for Europe, a Regional SDG Progress report ([Towards Achieving the](#)

[Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE Region](#)) Towards Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE Region) was prepared for the first time.

51. The question of what should be the relevant documentation to facilitate the discussions and knowledge-sharing and how to prepare it deserves further exploration. Important considerations are the timely preparation of these documents, a close alignment between the issues presented there and the discussion, the use of appropriate templates to gather information, the engagement of necessary partners in these efforts and the potential uses of this documentation after the RFSDs. Some participants have also suggested that more formal peer reviews of case studies against best practices could take place. Less formally, participants could act as discussants reviewing and providing comments and inputs to policy actions presented by other participants. Other regional economic commissions (ECA, ESCAP) prepare annual sustainable development reports in collaboration with other organizations.

## **E. Outputs of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development and contribution to the global follow-up and review process**

52. The RFSDs have served as preparatory meetings for the annual United Nations HLPF. They provided the official regional input to the global review of progress on the SDGs carried out at the HLPF. This contribution represents an essential element of the overall architecture for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The Chair's summary has been the only output produced as a result of the RFSDs for the ECE region. In RFSDs organized by other regional economic commissions, the practice includes the preparation of outcome declarations (ECA) and inter-governmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations (ECLAC). Currently ESCAP is considering formulating main messages (in a non-negotiated modality) which could be transmitted to the HLPF.

53. The substantive discussions at the plenary segment of the RFSDs have provided a platform to exchange experiences on multiple aspects of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), including methods of preparation, engagement of different actors and subsequent impacts on implementation, as reflected in the reports of the RFSDs. While there is no reference to VNRs in Decisions B (67) and B (68), the resolution establishing the Forum in the ECLAC region explicitly mentions the possibility of hosting voluntary State-led national reviews.

54. There have been some suggestions on how to enhance and expand further the contribution of the RFSD to the review of the SDGs. Some participants have suggested that discussions from peer learning round tables should develop specific sets of recommendations or key messages.

55. Another option to enhance further this contribution could be creating a regular space for the consideration of Voluntary National Reviews, including in particular their regional dimensions and transboundary aspects. The RFSD could provide an opportunity to discuss VNR approaches and draft VNRs in more detail than it is possible at the HLPF, while drawing attention to existing regional commonalities and without aiming to create a parallel or additional reporting mechanism. This is a possibility that is also being considered at ESCAP. In addition, linkages and feedback loops between multiple VNRs for the numerous countries in the region presenting their second and third VNRs could be featured.

56. To strengthen the outcome of the Forum in support of the decade of action, in addition to the Chair's summary, main messages could be formulated, in a non-negotiated modality, which could be transmitted to the HLPF and be reflected in the ministerial declaration of the HLPF.

57. At the HLPF, an institutionalized session during the high-level segment could be dedicated to the review of outcomes emanating from the regional forums, providing sufficient time for a substantive discussion. A set of thematic key messages emanating from the RFSD could also be used by speakers from the region in the HLPF's thematic sessions.

58. In view of the evidence in this note and the comparison with RFSDs conducted by other Regional Economic Commissions (RECs), the following **recommendations** are presented for discussion:

***Recommendation 1. Explore the use of virtual formats to facilitate more focused discussions, enhance the peer learning experience and strengthen partnerships***

59. Virtual formats are not intended to replace physical events and all the benefits these bring. However, they can contribute to address the challenge that large numbers of participants pose to have in-depth and interactive discussions. Virtual elements could be organized throughout the year, with the support of partners, addressing specific questions in smaller groups, thus facilitating peer-learning.

***Recommendation 2. Strengthen the role of the Regional Forum as a stakeholder platform***

60. The RFSD has engaged an increased number of non-governmental stakeholders, who have been active participants in the various segments of the Forum, adding to the vibrancy and interest of the meeting. Developing stronger relations with major groups and other stakeholders, including in particular local authorities, business and industry and the scientific and technological community, would enrich the discussions and offer new sources of knowledge for the exchange of experiences.

***Recommendation 3. Engage with interested member States and subregional organizations to hold subregional events that will feed into the Regional Forum, including through virtual means***

61. The ECE region is a diverse and the Forum should reflect this diversity. Subregional organizations have participated in the Forum and provided their perspectives while the various segments have given an opportunity to hear voices from all parts of the region. However, dedicated events with a subregional focus would allow to discuss in more detail problems of common interest to participant countries and exchange relevant experiences. The use of virtual means would provide an additional degree of flexibility in the organization of these events, which could also take place in a physical format and be organized or co-organized by member States.

***Recommendation 4. Provide a regular space for the discussion of VNRs at the Regional Forums***

62. A dedicated space for the discussion of VNRs could be used by member States in different ways, providing the opportunity to have more detailed and regionally-focused exchanges that it is possible at the HLPF. Member States could use the Forum as a platform to present VNRs under preparation, concentrate on particular aspects of the VNRs that are relevant to the SDGs under review in the HLPF that year or, for those who have presented VNRs at the HLPF several times, show the evolution of VNRs and the progress achieved from one VNR to the next.

***Recommendation 5. Strengthen the visibility of the inputs to the High-level Political Forum by providing a set of clear messages after each RFSD***

63. The Chair's summary is prepared through an inclusive process that reflects a plurality of views and experiences, given a prominent role to those expressed by member States. The current format, however, does not facilitate identifying clear messages that could be easily communicated. Elaborating this set of messages could contribute to enhancing the profile of the RFSD at the HLPF, including by channelling those messages into the HLPF thematic reviews. Overall, in its current setting, the HLPF provides limited opportunities to discuss regional inputs. This is an issue that member States might consider addressing in the ongoing review of the format and organizational aspects of the HLPF

**REGIONAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (RFSD)**  
**Comparison between the RFSDs of the different United Nations Regional Economic Commissions (RECs)**

	UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)	UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)	UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)	UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA)	UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
<b>Frequency</b>	Annual basis (since 2015)	Annual basis (since 2017)	Annual basis (since 2014)	Annual basis (since 2014)	Annual basis (since 2017)
<b>Duration</b>	3 days	3 days	3 days	3 days	1.5 days
<b>Participation</b>	2020: 3000 participants	2019: 1200 participants 2020: postponed	2019: 850 participants 2020: virtual meeting (with 730 registrations)	2019: 300 participants 2020: postponed	2019: 855 participants 2020: max virtual capacity, 300
<b>Stakeholder involvement (recommendation 2*)</b>	Regional workshops for major groups and other stakeholders, including Youth Forum and Science, Technology and Innovation Forum	Civil society consultations, including youth	Asia-Pacific People's Forum, Youth Forum, pre-meetings by various stakeholders (e.g. on sustainable trade)	Arab Region Parliamentary Forum, thematic regional consultations (e.g. on climate change and SDG financing)	Pre-meetings for civil society and youth
<b>Subregional pre-meetings (recommendation 3*)</b>	-	-	Approx. 5 subregional preparatory meetings	-	-
<b>Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) (recommendation 4*)</b>	Exchange of approaches, experiences and lessons learned in conducting VNRs (no dedicated space for presenting VNRs)	ECLAC resolution mentions that RFSD could serve for "hosting voluntary State-led national reviews". ( <a href="#">resolution 700 XXXVI</a> )	Considerations that the RFSD could be an opportunity for member States to present a draft of their VNRs. ( <a href="#">ESCAP/76/32</a> )	RFSD creates "a space for dialogue and providing countries that are preparing their VNRs with a chance to submit them for peer review". ( <a href="#">E/HLPF/2019/3/Add.3</a> )	Exchange of approaches, experiences and lessons learned in conducting VNRs (no dedicated space for presenting VNRs)
<b>Forum outcomes (recommendation 5*)<sup>1</sup></b>	Key messages and declaration (e.g. <a href="#">Victoria Falls Declaration</a> in 2020)	Chair's Summary and intergovernmentally agreed recommendations ( <a href="#">LC/FDS.3/4</a> <a href="#">ECLAC/RFSD/2019/1</a> )	Chair's Summary; considerations for formulating main messages (in a non-negotiated modality) ( <a href="#">ESCAP/76/32</a> )	Chair's Summary of the RFSD	Chair's Summary of the RFSD

\* This document was prepared by desk research, without the involvement of other RECs.

\*\* See recommendations of the RFSD Evaluation Note prepared by the ECE secretariat (pages 14 and 15).