

## Evaluation Survey of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region 2021

### 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 2021 (Geneva, 17-18 March 2021) on 18 March 2021. It remained open until 16 April 2021.

During this period, 88 responses were received (out of a total of 1,444 registered participants). Most of the responses came from representatives of UNECE governments (25.0 per cent) and non-governmental organizations (30.7 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	25.0	22
UN department, fund, programme, specialized agency or related organization	10.2	9
Intergovernmental and regional organization	5.7	5
Non-governmental organization	30.7	27
Private sector	6.8	6
Academia	5.7	5
Others (please specify)	15.9	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>88</b>

The governments who participated in the survey were Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belarus, Croatia, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Switzerland and Uzbekistan. Responses were received by more than one participant in a number of cases.

Most respondents participated in the plenary session “*Key actions and accelerators to tackle the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and to promote a sustainable recovery*” and, in lower numbers, in the high-level policy segment, both in the first day. The most attended round table was the one “*Partnerships for a sustainable recovery: Initiatives to accelerate the achievement of the environment and climate goals of the 2030 Agenda*”, where 28.4 per cent of the respondents participated. Side events proved popular, as more than two fifths 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)	35.2	31
Plenary session (first day): Key actions and accelerators to tackle the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and to promote a sustainable recovery	45.5	40
Plenary session (second day): Experiences from the region with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)	29.6	26
Session 1-1: The impact of COVID on sustainable development: strengthening health system and social protection	23.9	21
Session 1-2: Session 1-2: Accelerating SDG progress in the time of a pandemic: improving food systems to make healthy diets accessible to all	14.8	13
Session 1-3: Road safety - changing direction	5.7	5
Session 2-1: Recovering from COVID-19 through a sustainable and human-centred approach to the future of work	11.4	10
Session 2-2: Young people and COVID-19: Impact and Solutions	10.2	9
Session 2-3: Transforming tourism for a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive post- COVID19 world	14.8	13
Session 3-1: Partnerships for a sustainable recovery: Initiatives to accelerate the achievement of the environment and climate goals of the 2030 Agenda	28.4	25
Session 3-2: Circular economy, Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, and value chain implications	17.1	15
Session 3-3: Building back better through Climate-Resilient Recovery	15.9	14
Session 3-4: Snapshot on Boreal forests' contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals	12.5	11
Session 4-1: SDGs and COVID – how can data and statistics help building back better?	20.5	18
Session 4-2: Digital Transformation for Sustainable Development Goals in the Wake of COVID-19	15.9	14
Side events	42.1	37
Pre-meetings	17.1	15

## 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	0.0	3.4	17.1	46.6	33.0	100
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	2.3	2.3	21.6	42.1	31.8	100
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	3.4	8.0	19.3	44.3	25.0	100
Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	10.2	17.1	25.0	26.1	21.6	100
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	1.1	4.6	15.9	50.0	28.4	100

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 seen as highly relevant to the work area or expertise of participants: 79.6 per cent considered them very or extremely useful while only 3.4 per cent thought that they were not or just somewhat useful. The identification of good practices and experiences received a similar score. The Forum was perceived as facilitating the exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants, with 69.3 per cent of total respondents considering that it was very or extremely useful. The area that received a less positive assessment concerned the opportunity to establish new useful contacts, which shows the limitations of a virtual format in this regard. Thus, only 47.7 per cent considered that the Forum very or extremely useful while 27.3 per cent thought that it was somewhat useful or not 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	4.6	22.7	50.0	22.7	100
Knowledge and information relevant for your future work	0.0	4.6	36.4	45.5	13.6	100
Providing a forum for exchange of information and sharing of experiences with other participants	0.0	13.6	22.7	40.9	22.7	100
Providing an opportunity to establish new useful contacts	18.2	13.6	36.4	22.7	9.1	100
Identification of good practices and useful experiences	0.0	9.1	18.2	54.6	18.2	100

The assessment provided by UNECE governments (table 4, previous page), is rather similar, with practically no differences in the ranking of the areas. However, governments appear particularly critical of the contribution of the Forum to establish new useful contacts: the percentages of those that consider it very or extremely useful are identical to those that see it as not or somewhat useful.

UNECE member States have repeatedly expressed the importance they attach to peer learning in the Forum, so the questionnaire included 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	2.0	8.2	26.5	36.7	26.5	100
Organization of the discussions	0.0	20.5	18.0	33.3	28.2	100
Policy experiences presented	5.6	11.1	36.1	27.8	19.4	100
Time management	15.8	7.9	29.0	23.7	23.7	100
Virtual platform	7.9	13.2	21.1	34.2	23.7	100

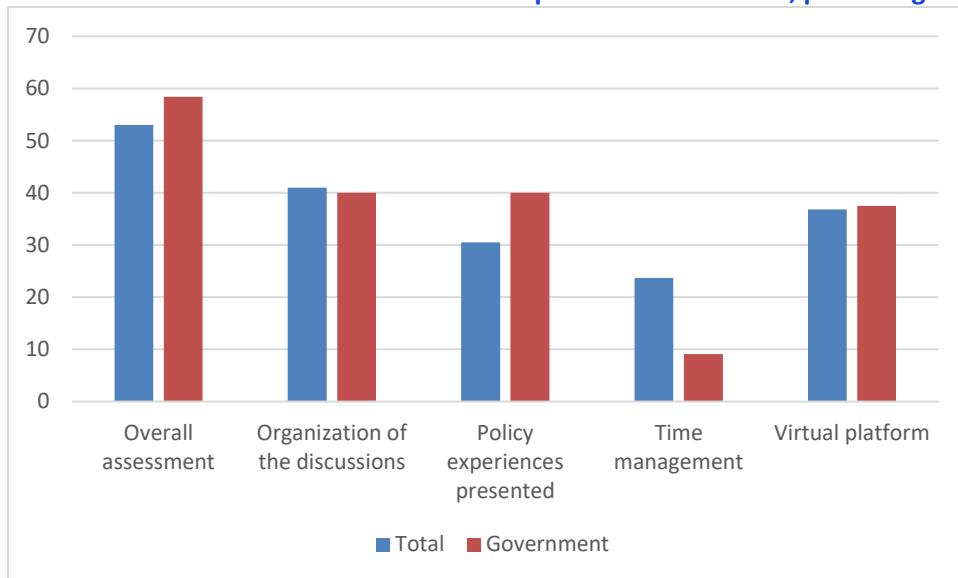
The overall assessment was positive, with 63.2 of responses assessing the peer learning experience as very good or excellent and only 10.2 per cent considering that it was poor or needed improvement. While 57.9 per cent of the respondents considered that the virtual platform was excellent or very good, there was a sizeable group, 21.1 per cent, that thought that was poor or needed improvement. Time management received the worst assessment, with the almost lowest positive and the higher negative marks, resulting in the lowest balance between them, at 23.7 per cent.

The answers of government participants only are shown in table 6. There are no significant differences in the overall rankings with the overall sample. Government participants gave a better assessment than total respondents regarding the overall consideration of peer learning, as nobody considered that was poor or in need of improvement, while 58.4 per cent thought that it was excellent or very good. The assessment of policy experiences presented was also significantly better among government participants. However, governments participants are even more critical of time management, with the difference between positive and negative answers being only 9.1 per cent (Chart 1).

**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	0.0	0.0	41.7	41.7	16.7	100
Organization of the discussions	0.0	20.0	20.0	30.0	30.0	100
Policy experiences presented	0.0	10.0	40.0	40.0	10.0	100
Time management	18.2	18.2	18.2	9.1	36.4	100
Virtual platform	0.0	25.0	12.5	50.0	12.5	100

**Chart 1. Difference between more and less positive assessments, percentages**



**Note:** Sum of answers “excellent” and “very good” minus the sum of answers “poor” and “in need of improvement”

Given the format of the Forum in 2021, the survey included a question regarding the continued use of virtual platforms to organize peer learning sessions in a similar way as it was done in the 2021 Forum. Table 7 shows the extent to which respondents agreed with this possibility.

**Table 7. Use of virtual platforms to organize peer learning sessions**

Assessment	All respondents	Governments
Strongly agree	23.5	0.0
Agree	49.4	61.1
Neither agree nor disagree	22.2	33.3
Disagree	4.9	5.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

The use of virtual platforms is generally supported, as almost three quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed while those that are clearly against it represented less than 5 per cent. The acceptance of this option is less marked among government participants. While 61.1 per cent agreed with the use of virtual platforms, no respondent showed strong agreement while the percentage of those that disagreed was slightly higher.

Comments provided to justify the answers given drew attention to the benefits of virtual sessions in reducing costs of attendance and increasing reach. However, many comments also emphasised the limitations of this format, as it precludes interaction with other participants and reduces networking possibilities.

**Table 8. Assessment of the preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum, all respondents, percentages**

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
<b>Programme</b>	0.0	5.7	19.3	43.2	31.8	100
<b>Structure of the Forum</b>	0.0	4.6	26.1	39.8	29.6	100
<b>Documentation</b>	1.1	4.6	30.7	36.4	27.3	100
<b>Communication with participants prior to the event</b>	4.6	12.5	15.9	39.8	27.3	100
<b>Organizational arrangements for and during the event</b>	2.3	4.6	28.4	34.1	30.7	100

Participants were also asked to provide their opinion on various aspects regarding the preparation and organization of the Forum, which are summarized in Table 8 (previous page).

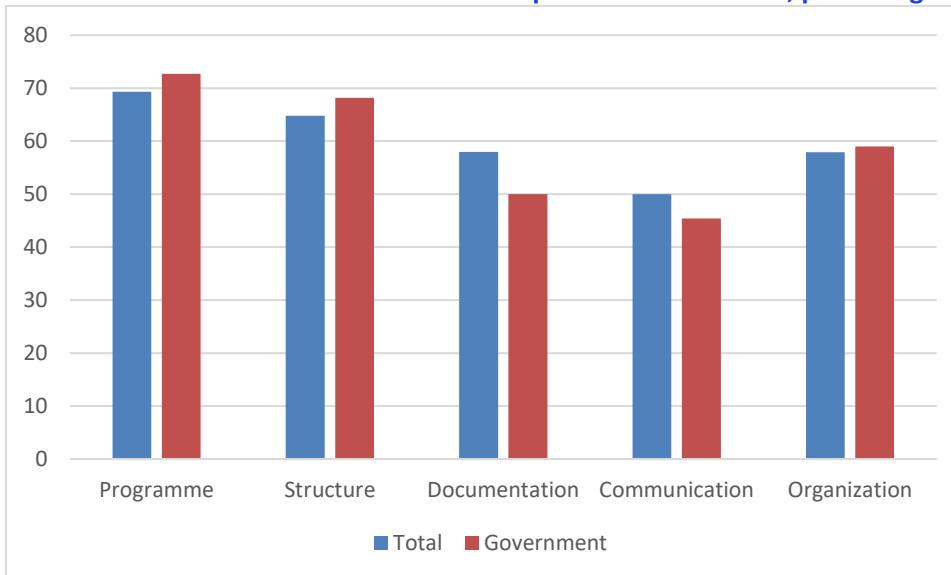
The programme of the event was the most appreciated aspect (75.0 per cent of respondents thought that it was excellent or very good while only 5.7 per cent considered that it was poor or needed improvement). The structure of the Forum also scored highly (69.4 per cent of respondents considered that was very good or excellent and only 4.6 per cent answered that it was poor or needed improvement). Documentation and organizational arrangements attracted somewhat lower but similar scores. By contrast, comparatively less favourable assessments were received regarding communication with participants prior to the event. While 67.1 per cent of respondents thought that it was excellent or very good (the third largest mark received by any area), a sizeable 17.1 per cent considered that it was poor or in need of improvement. Given the large number of events and organisers engaged in the preparation of the Forum, it is more difficult to draw general conclusions from this assessment.

The assessment of preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum by government participants (table 9) is in line with that observed in the overall sample, albeit with some small differences. The balance of positive (excellent or very good) and negative (poor or needs improvement) answers is higher among government respondents concerning the programme, the structure of the Forum and the organizational arrangements, while being somewhat lower for the other two aspects (documentation and communication) (chart 2).

**Table 9. Assessment of the preparatory and organizational aspects of the Forum, governments, percentages**

Aspect	Poor	Needs improvement	Adequate	Very good	Excellent	Total
<b>Programme</b>	0.0	4.6	18.2	54.6	22.7	100
<b>Structure of the Forum (plenary and parallel round tables)</b>	0.0	0.0	31.8	40.9	27.3	100
<b>Documentation</b>	0.0	9.1	31.8	40.9	18.2	100
<b>Communication with participants prior to the event</b>	4.6	9.1	27.3	40.9	18.2	100
<b>Organizational arrangements for and during the event</b>	0.0	4.6	31.8	40.9	22.7	100

**Chart 2. Difference between more and less positive assessments, percentages**



**Note:** Sum of answers “excellent” and “very good” minus the sum of answers “poor” and “in need of improvement”

The overall assessment of the event was very positive (table 10), with 31.8 per cent of respondents considering that it was excellent and 43.2 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, as 81.8 per cent of government respondents considered that the Forum was excellent or very good against 75.0 per cent in the overall sample.

**Table 10. Overall assessment of the Forum, percentages**

Assessment	All respondents	Governments
Not satisfactory	2.3	0.0
Adequate	22.7	18.2
Good	43.2	54.6
Excellent	31.8	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

An overwhelming share of respondents (87.5 per cent) would recommend that other experts from their countries or organizations attend similar events in the future, while 12.5 per cent may consider such a possibility. No respondent in the sample declined making such a recommendation. Government responses show a similarly positive assessment: while 86.4 per cent of respondents would recommend future participation, 13.6 per cent were not completely sure.

In their comments, respondents explained some of the reasons for their assessment. The Forum provided

an opportunity to discuss a large number of topics and made possible to hear the voices of many different actors. The degree of interaction depended on the sessions: while some participants praised this aspect, for others, it was insufficient, due to the excessively large number of presentations. Registration was mentioned by some respondents as too complicated. Some answers also mentioned that focussing on more innovative issues with a concrete focus, while eliminating those aspects that are already generally known, would add value to the Forum.

### **3. Suggestions for the future**

There were a number of suggestions for future work. As in previous surveys, many participants remain concerned on how to make the event more interactive.

Some specific suggestions that were raised by particular individuals concerned:

***a) Focus***

- Ensure better substantive integration of gender equality across all sessions
- Have a narrower focus
- Reduce the number of presentations to facilitate interaction
- Develop specific recommendations
- Increase variety of experiences from different parts of the region
- Bring experts from other regions to put the discussions in a global context

***b) Partnerships and networking***

- Develop partnerships with member States for the organization of sessions
- Explore the possibility of identifying “twins” for the implementation of lessons derived from peer learning
- Engage the private sector more
- Give a voice to smaller civil society organizations

***c) Organizational and logistic aspects***

- Consolidate improvements in accessibility observed this year to make them a permanent feature of the Forum
- Facilitate and centralise registration