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**Subsidiary Body for Scientific and
Technological Advice**

**Technical review of information reported under the
Convention by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention
in their biennial reports and national communications**

Report by the secretariat

Summary

This report describes activities relating to the technical review of information reported under the Convention in the fourth biennial reports of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, which were due by 1 January 2020. The activities include the 7th meeting of lead reviewers and the training of reviewers of biennial reports and national communications. Information on the status of submission and review of fourth biennial reports is contained in document FCCC/SBI/2020/INF.7.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

Annex I Party	Party included in Annex I to the Convention
BR	biennial report
COP	Conference of the Parties
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CTF	common tabular format
ERT	expert review team
ETF	enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement
FTC	finance, technology and capacity-building
GHG	greenhouse gas
LR	lead reviewer
NC	national communication
non-Annex I Party	Party not included in Annex I to the Convention
PaMs	policies and measures
SBSTA	Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice
UNFCCC review guidelines	“Guidelines for the technical review of information reported under the Convention related to greenhouse gas inventories, biennial reports and national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention”

I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. COP 20 requested¹ the secretariat to prepare an annual report to the SBSTA on the composition of ERTs performing the review of NCs and BRs, including on the selection of ERTs and the LRs and on the action taken to ensure the application of the selection criteria² defined in the UNFCCC review guidelines.³
2. The UNFCCC review guidelines stipulate that the LRs shall collectively prepare an annual report to the SBSTA as part of the report referred to in paragraph 1 above, containing suggestions on how to improve the quality, efficiency and consistency of the reviews of GHG inventories, BRs and NCs.⁴

B. Scope of the note

3. This report describes activities relating to the technical review of information reported under the Convention in the BR4s of Annex I Parties, which were due by 1 January 2020, and activities resulting from the 7th meeting of LRs of BRs and NCs. The report includes data on experts nominated and eligible to conduct BR reviews. Further, the report provides information on the training of reviewers of BRs and NCs conducted in 2020.
4. Reviews of 30 Parties' BR4s were conducted in 2020 and 26 technical review reports had been published by the time of preparation of this report. Information on the status of submission and review of BR4s is contained in document FCCC/SBI/2020/INF.7.

C. Possible action by the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

5. The SBSTA is invited to take note of the information contained in this report.

II. Composition of expert review teams and review of fourth biennial reports

6. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines,⁵ ERTs shall be composed of eligible experts selected on an ad hoc basis from the UNFCCC roster of experts, nominated by Parties and, as appropriate, by intergovernmental organizations. Participating experts shall have recognized competence in the area to be reviewed and shall neither be nationals of the Party under review nor be nominated or funded by that Party. The experts must have undertaken the necessary training and passed examinations as part of the training programme for review experts for the technical review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties⁶ or have experience in the relevant reviews and therefore be eligible to serve as reviewers of BRs and/or NCs.
7. ERTs may vary in size and composition, considering the national circumstances of the Party under review,⁷ and the review experts shall be selected in such a way that the collective skills and competences of ERTs address all areas under review. For the review of

¹ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, para. 40.

² Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paras. 36–37.

³ Decision 13/CP.20, annex.

⁴ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, para. 44.

⁵ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paras. 26 and 28–30.

⁶ "Training programme for review experts for the technical review of biennial reports and national communications of Parties included in Annex I to the Convention" (decision 15/CP.20, annex). To be eligible to conduct the reviews, an expert must successfully complete the training programme by passing examinations for the course on general and cross-cutting matters and for at least one sectoral course.

⁷ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, para. 26.

BRs, competence in reviewing PaMs, GHG emission trends and projections, and the provision of FTC support, as well as an understanding of the Party's quantified economy-wide emission reduction target and the progress towards achieving it, are required.

8. Teams composed of 13–24 experts reviewed the BR4s in centralized reviews. Typically, with regard to the division of tasks within an ERT, one or two experts were assigned per Party to review the information provided in each of the following parts of the BR: (1) generalist/cross-cutting matters; (2) mitigation actions, PaMs, the economy-wide emission reduction target and progress towards achieving it; (3) projections; and (4) the provision of support to developing country Parties.

9. At the time of preparation of this report, the secretariat had coordinated the reviews of 30 BR4s during six centralized reviews covering four to six Parties each;⁸ and the technical review reports for 26 Parties had been completed and published. Of those 26 Parties, 18 improved the quality of their reporting in response to the comments provided by the ERT during the review week and resubmitted their BRs or CTF tables. Of the 26 technical review reports, 25 were completed by the due date of four months after the review week despite the additional efforts required to review the resubmissions received after the review week.

10. Despite the challenging circumstances related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the experts were committed to performing their functions.⁹ They mentioned that conducting reviews remotely gave them the opportunity to exchange experience and enhance their understanding of measurement, reporting and verification processes. Yet, remote participation has posed challenges for Parties, experts and the secretariat, including fewer opportunities to strengthen the capacity of new experts, limitations on the engagement of reviewers, and increased workload for reviewers, review officers and the information technology support team. Some experts reported difficulties with Internet connectivity, working across different time zones and finding a balance between the review tasks and their day-to-day jobs. Thus, conducting centralized reviews remotely may not be sustainable in the long term and should be done only in extraordinary circumstances. When possible, the mandated centralized and in-country mode of the technical reviews¹⁰ will continue.

11. To express its gratitude to the experts for their continued dedication, the secretariat has named them on the UNFCCC website.¹¹

12. Pursuant to the UNFCCC review guidelines, the secretariat shall select the members of an ERT with a view to achieving both a geographical balance and a balance between experts from Annex I Parties and non-Annex I Parties in the overall composition.¹² To this end, the composition of the ERTs in 2020 was broadly balanced, taking into account the areas of expertise needed and the experience in reviews, language and availability of the experts.

13. A total of 124 experts from 66 Parties were involved in the BR4 reviews conducted in 2020, consisting of 52 (42.0 per cent) experts from Annex I Parties and 72 (58.0 per cent) from non-Annex I Parties; and 55 female experts (44.4 per cent) and 69 male experts (55.6 per cent).

14. Of the 124 experts, 63 (51.0 per cent) were participating in the process for the first time, of whom 41 were from non-Annex I Parties and 22 from Annex I Parties.

15. As in previous review cycles, the number of participating experts from the five United Nations geopolitical regional groups was fairly balanced, with 31 experts from African States, 15 from Asia-Pacific States, 25 from Eastern European States, 21 from Latin American and Caribbean States and 32 from Western European and other States (see figure 1).

⁸ Owing to the circumstances related to COVID-19, the technical reviews of 30 BR4s scheduled between March and October 2020 had to be conducted remotely.

⁹ See <https://unfccc.int/news/vital-transparency-work-proceeds-remotely> and <https://unfccc.int/news/virtual-review-shows-climate-action-in-line-with-2020-emission-reduction-targets>.

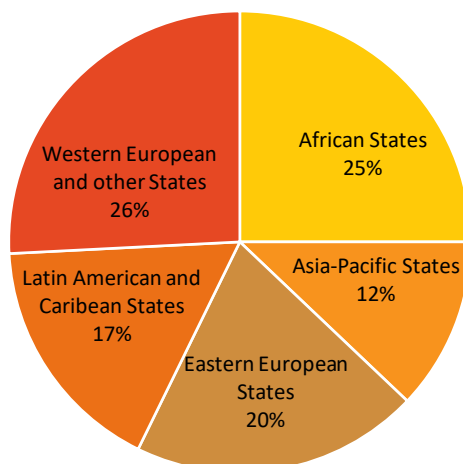
¹⁰ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, paras. 18–19.

¹¹ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/training-programmes-for-experts/celebrating-technical-experts#eq-4>.

¹² Decision 13/CP.20, annex, para. 37.

Figure 1

Distribution of experts participating in the technical review of fourth biennial reports in 2020 by United Nations geopolitical regional group



16. In composing the ERTs, efforts were made to involve experts from small island developing States and the least developed countries. A total of 16 such experts participated in the BR4 reviews in 2020.¹³ The practice of involving new experts helps to increase the pool of experienced reviewers and provides opportunities for a larger number of experts to build their capacity in relation to measurement, reporting and verification systems and contribute to implementation of the ETF.

17. As at 27 August 2020, 1,390 experts (an additional 197 experts since 2019) had been nominated to conduct BR and NC reviews by their respective national focal points. Since the end of 2019, nine Parties and two international organizations have nominated experts to participate in the BR and NC review process for the first time.¹⁴

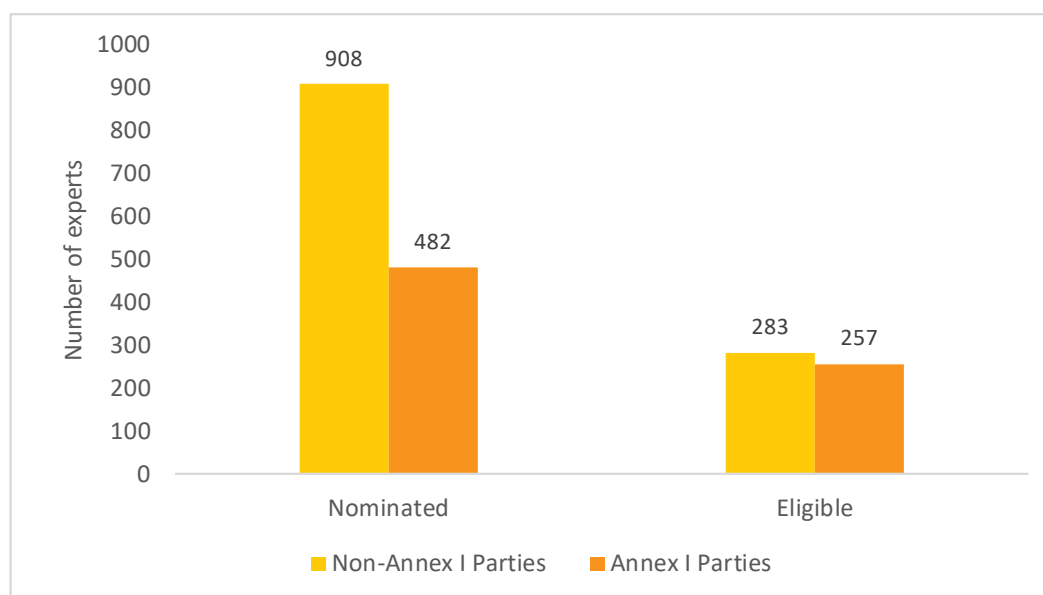
18. All but two Annex I Parties submitted their BR4s either in English or accompanied by an English translation. One Party submitted its BR4 in Spanish only and one Party in Russian only; and ensuring the balanced composition of the ERTs reviewing those submissions was challenging.

19. Figure 2 shows the number of experts nominated and eligible to participate in BR and NC reviews at the time of preparation of this report. It is apparent that many experts face challenges in undertaking and completing the training programme for BR and NC reviewers to become eligible to participate in the reviews. Of the 1,390 experts nominated, only 540 are currently eligible to participate; that is, have prior experience of NC reviews if nominated to the roster of experts and participated in NC reviews before 2014, or have passed the necessary examinations for NC and BR reviews. Of the 61 experts newly eligible since 2019, 22 are from Annex I Parties and 39 from non-Annex I Parties.

¹³ From Bahamas, Bhutan, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guyana, Haiti, Liberia, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Senegal, Sudan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zambia.

¹⁴ Fiji, Gabon, Guatemala, Guinea, Mauritius, Myanmar, Panama, Sao Tome and Principe, Suriname, the Global Green Growth Institute and the United Nations University.

Figure 2

Number of experts nominated and eligible to participate in the review of biennial reports and national communications

Note: Nominated as at 27 August 2020; eligible as at 4 October 2020.

20. In the survey on expert availability and interest conducted by the secretariat before the BR4 review cycle at the end of 2019, 65 per cent of eligible experts expressed interest in participating in the BR4 reviews in 2020–2021 (311 of the 479 experts eligible at the time of the survey).

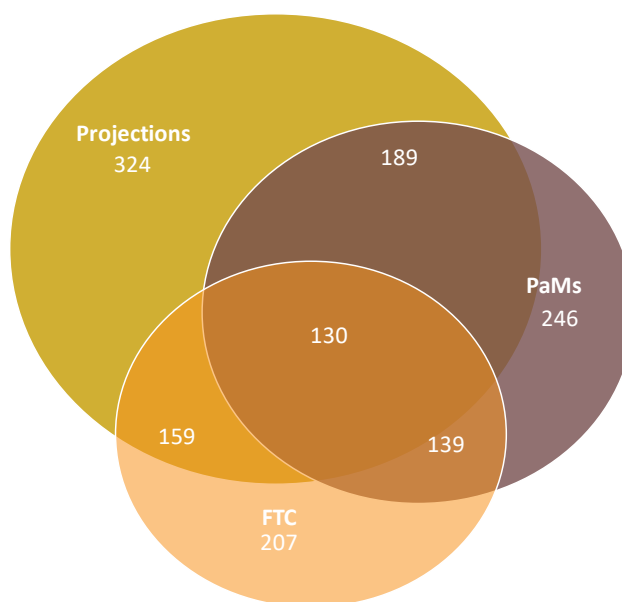
21. Of the 1,390 nominated experts for the BR4 review cycle in 2020, there are more experts from non-Annex I Parties (908) than from Annex I Parties (482). However, with regard to those eligible to participate in the BR and NC reviews, the share is almost the same for both groups of Parties (48.0 per cent for Annex I Parties and 52.0 per cent for non-Annex I Parties).

22. Overall, 246 experts are eligible to review PaMs (124 from Annex I Parties and 122 from non-Annex I Parties), 324 to review projections (154 from Annex I Parties and 170 from non-Annex I Parties) and 207 to review FTC (68 from Annex I Parties and 139 from non-Annex I Parties), with many having taken examinations in two or more areas of expertise.¹⁵ A total of 130 experts are certified to review PaMs, projections and FTC, while 189 are certified to review PaMs and projections, 139 to review PaMs and FTC, and 159 to review projections and FTC. This shows that more experts in FTC are required to achieve a balance in terms of areas of expertise. Figure 3 shows the number of eligible experts by area of expertise.

¹⁵ The areas of expertise examined are FTC support, PaMs and projections.

Figure 3

Number of experts who have completed the training programme for the technical review of national communications and biennial reports, by area of expertise



III. Seventh meeting of lead reviewers of biennial reports and national communications¹⁶

23. The 7th meeting of LRs of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties was held remotely¹⁷ from 9 to 10 June 2020.¹⁸ A total of 93 experts were invited to the meeting. Of the 67 experts who attended, 31 were from non-Annex I Parties and 36 from Annex I Parties.

24. In accordance with the UNFCCC review guidelines, the meeting addressed both procedural and technical issues relating to the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties with a view to facilitating the work of the LRs to ensure the consistency of reviews across Parties.

A. Approach to the review of fourth biennial reports

25. The LRs noted the information presented by the secretariat on the approach to the review of BR4s. The BR4s of Annex I Parties will be reviewed in nine centralized reviews between March 2020 and March 2021. This will allow the corresponding technical review reports to be published in time to carry out the multilateral assessment for Parties, as feasible, at the sessions of the subsidiary bodies to take place in 2021, and to complete the fourth international assessment and review cycle within two years after the submission due date of the BR4s, in accordance with the mandate.¹⁹

26. The LRs noted that the measures proposed by the secretariat for organizing the BR4 reviews facilitate timeliness and consistency. In particular, the LRs took note of the updated and integrated checklist and review report template, and the updated schedule for the review week. The LRs encourage ERTs to follow the approach proposed and to finalize the draft reports, ensuring accuracy and consistency, on time, namely by the end of the review week.

¹⁶ This chapter broadly corresponds to the conclusions of the 7th meeting of LRs.

¹⁷ Owing to the circumstances related to COVID-19, the 7th meeting of LRs had to be conducted remotely.

¹⁸ See <https://unfccc.int/lrs-brs-ncs>.

¹⁹ Decision 2/CP.17, para. 27.

B. State of play in the development of the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement and the evolving role of lead reviewers

27. The LR took note of the information presented by the secretariat on the outcomes of COP 25, and in particular the technical work reflected in the informal notes by the facilitators prepared during SBSTA 51 on methodological issues under the Paris Agreement related to the ETF.²⁰ The LR also took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the implementation of the international consultation and analysis process, which helps developing country Parties gain experience as they transition to implementing the ETF.

28. The LR took note of the work of the secretariat on the development of tools such as frequently asked questions on the ETF and a reference manual on the ETF. Acknowledging the usefulness of such tools, the LR invited the secretariat to inform them of updates to those tools, taking into account comments received from LR by 15 August 2020, at its 8th meeting, to be held in 2021.

C. Improving consistency of reviews

29. The LR took note of the background papers entitled “Completeness and Transparency Assessment of Information Reported in Technical Review Reports of 3rd Biennial Reports – 2020 Update” and “Assessment of Information Related to Impacts of Policies and Measures Reported in Technical Review Reports of Third Biennial Reports” prepared by the secretariat and acknowledged that the analyses contained therein facilitate improvements to the review process.²¹ The LR requested the secretariat to continue updating the analysis of consistency in reviews on the basis of the technical reviews of BR4s and to present the analysis as an input for discussion at the 8th meeting of LR.

30. The LR requested the secretariat to prepare the review practice guidance for 2020,²² incorporating the approaches discussed, revised and agreed at the 7th meeting of LR, which cover cross-cutting, PaMs and projection issues. The LR agreed that the review approaches presented therein should be applied by ERTs in the remaining reviews of BR4s.

31. The LR also requested the secretariat to continue collecting information on and analysing review-related issues raised by ERTs during the BR4 reviews with a view to presenting them for discussion at the 8th meeting of LR.

IV. Training of reviewers of biennial reports and national communications

32. Training materials for the review of BRs and NCs were developed in 2014, and the implementation of the online courses of the training programme referred to in paragraph 6 above was initiated by the secretariat in 2015. The online courses were then updated and made available in September 2017, in response to the request from the COP²³ to enhance the training materials on the basis of mandates arising from decisions 24/CP.19 and 9/CP.21 and taking into account experience from conducting BR and NC reviews since 2014. In addition, the final examinations of the training programme were revised to improve clarity with a view to assisting experts whose mother tongue is not English.

²⁰ Methodological issues under the Paris Agreement include the preparation of (1) common reporting tables for national GHG inventories; (2) CTF tables for tracking progress towards nationally determined contributions; (3) CTF tables for information on financial, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building support provided and mobilized, and needed and received; (4) outlines of the biennial transparency report, national inventory document and technical expert review report; and (5) a training programme for technical experts participating in the technical expert review.

²¹ The background papers are available at <https://unfccc.int/event/7th-meeting-of-lead-reviewers-for-the-review-of-biennial-reports-and-national-communications>.

²² See <https://unfccc.int/RPG>.

²³ Decision 19/CP.23, para. 1.

33. In order to prepare for the reviews of BR4s, both new and experienced expert reviewers have been invited to participate in the updated courses and take the final examinations.

34. Since the previous annual report to the SBSTA,²⁴ two rounds of the training programme have been implemented and 285 nominated experts have registered for the training. Online examinations were held from 26 to 29 May 2020 and from 11 to 14 August 2020, resulting in 61 experts newly qualified to take part in the review of BRs and NCs. Additionally, 27 experts expanded on or refreshed their knowledge by passing additional examinations.

²⁴ FCCC/SBSTA/2019/INF.3.