



United Nations

FCCC/SBSTA/2021/INF.3



Framework Convention on
Climate Change

Distr.: General
23 September 2021

English only

Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice

Fifty-second to fifty-fifth session

Glasgow, 31 October to 6 November 2021

Item 18(a) of the provisional agenda

Annual reports on technical reviews

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

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 8th 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/2021/INF.5.



Abbreviations and acronyms

Annex I Party	Party included in Annex I to the Convention
BR	biennial report
COP	Conference of the Parties
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 reporting guidelines on NCs	“Guidelines for the preparation of national communications by Parties included in Annex I to the Convention, Part II: UNFCCC reporting guidelines on national communications”
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 8th 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 2020–2021.
4. Reviews of 41 Parties' BR4s were conducted between March 2020 and March 2021 and 41 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/2021/INF.5.

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

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.

collective skills and competences of ERTs address all areas under review. For the review of 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 11–24 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.

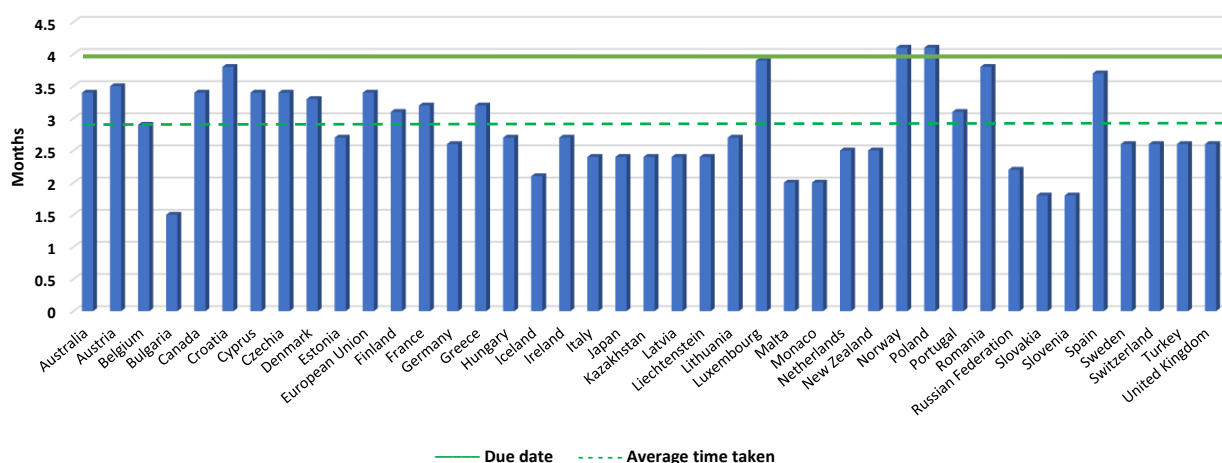
9. At the time of preparation of this report, the secretariat had coordinated the reviews of 41 BR4s during nine centralized reviews covering two to six Parties each⁸ and the technical review reports for 41 Parties had been completed and published.

10. Of those 41 Parties, 22 improved the quality of their reporting in response to the comments provided by the ERT during the review and resubmitted their BRs and/or common tabular format tables. Of the 265 preliminary issues identified during the review, the resubmissions addressed 92 mandatory reporting issues on transparency and completeness. The improvements related to transparency included clarification of the description of the Party's 2020 target and progress towards it, particularly regarding the contribution of units from market-based mechanisms and land use, land-use change and forestry, while those related to completeness included provision of additional information on several reporting requirements, mostly in relation to GHG projections.

11. Of the 41 technical review reports, 39 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. The average time taken to complete the 41 technical review reports was three months (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Time taken to complete the technical review reports of the fourth biennial reports



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.⁹ To this end, the composition of the ERTs for BR4 reviews in 2020 and 2021 was broadly balanced, taking into account the areas of expertise and gender balance needed in the teams and the experience in reviews and language proficiency of the experts in them.

13. A total of 160 experts from 75 Parties were involved in the BR4 reviews conducted in 2020 and 2021, consisting of 72 (45.0 per cent) experts from Annex I Parties and 88 (55.0 per

⁸ Owing to the circumstances related to coronavirus disease 2019, the technical reviews of the 41 BR4s scheduled between March 2020 and March 2021 had to be conducted remotely.

⁹ Decision 13/CP.20, annex, para. 37.

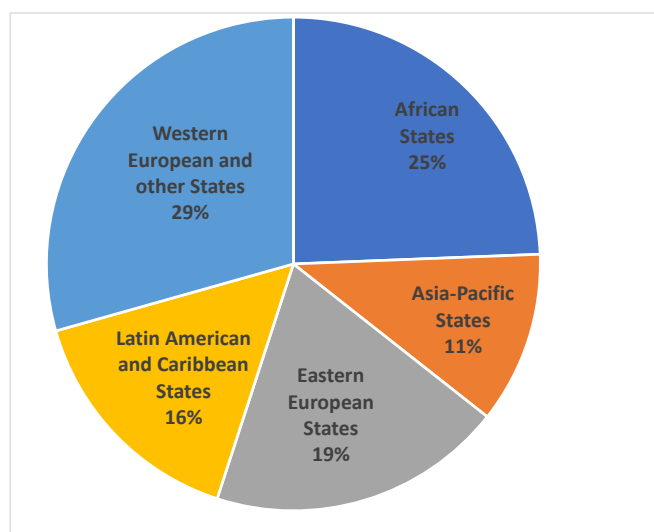
cent) from non-Annex I Parties, with and 76 female experts (47.5 per cent) and 84 male experts (52.5 per cent). To express its gratitude to the experts for their continued dedication to the transparency process, the secretariat has named them on the UNFCCC website.¹⁰

14. Of the 160 experts, 76 (47.5 per cent) were participating in the process for the first time, of whom 48 were from non-Annex I Parties and 28 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 47 experts from Western European and other States, 39 from African States, 31 from Eastern European States, 25 from Latin American and Caribbean States and 18 from Asia-Pacific States (see figure 2).

Figure 2

Distribution of experts participating in the technical review of fourth biennial reports in 2020 and 2021, by United Nations geopolitical regional group



Note: The figure for Asia-Pacific States includes an expert from the State of Palestine, albeit the Party is not affiliated with a 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 15 such experts participated in the BR4 reviews in 2020 and 2021.¹¹ 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 3 August 2021, 1,530 experts had been nominated to conduct BR and NC reviews by their respective national focal points. An additional 155 experts from 62 Parties have been nominated since 25 August 2020, including from 8 Parties that have nominated experts to participate in the BR and NC review process for the first time.¹²

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; ensuring the balanced composition of the ERTs reviewing those submissions was challenging.

19. Figure 3 shows the number of experts nominated and eligible to participate in BR and NC reviews as at 3 August 2021. Of the 1,530 experts nominated for the BR4 review cycle, there were more experts from non-Annex I Parties (1,029) than from Annex I Parties (501).

¹⁰ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/transparency-and-reporting/training-programmes-for-experts/celebrating-technical-experts#eq-4>.

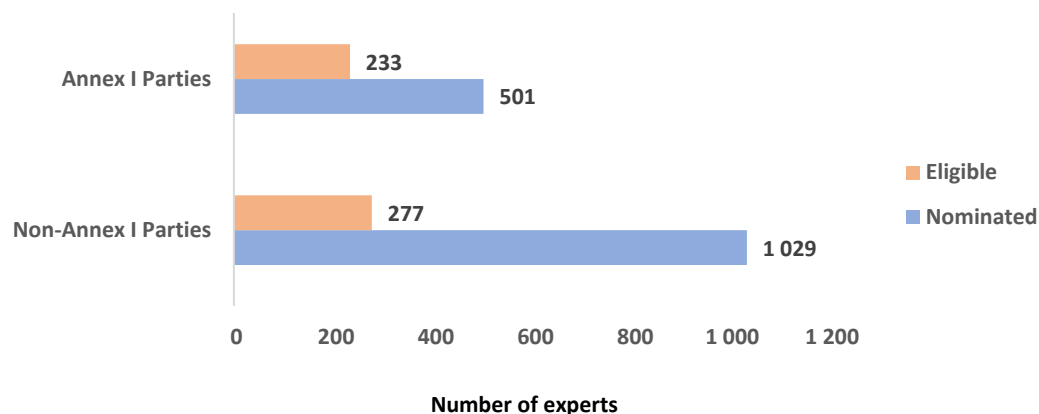
¹¹ From Bhutan, Cuba, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Guyana, Haiti, Liberia, Malawi, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Senegal, the Sudan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, and Zambia.

¹² Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Jamaica, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Nicaragua and South Sudan.

However, the percentage of experts who were eligible for the reviews¹³ is almost the same for both groups of Parties. Of the 1,530 experts nominated, only 514 (277 from non-Annex I Parties and 237 from Annex I Parties) are currently eligible to participate (46.1 per cent for Annex I Parties and 53.9 per cent for non-Annex I Parties). 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.

Figure 3

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

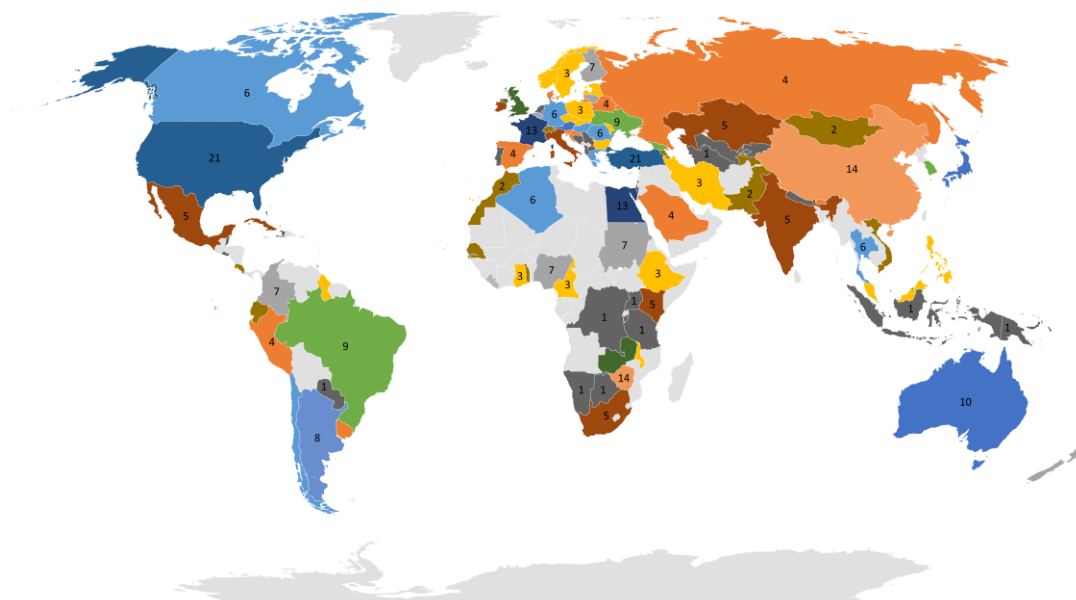


Note: Nominated and eligible as at 3 August 2021.

20. Of the 118 Parties represented by these 514 experts, 94 have 1–5 experts eligible to conduct BR and NC reviews, 24 have 6–10, 7 have 11–15 and 2 have 21 (see figure 4).

Figure 4

Number of experts eligible to participate in reviews of biennial reviews and national communications, by Party



Sources: Australian Bureau of Statistics, GeoNames, Microsoft, Navinfo, TomTom, Wikipedia.

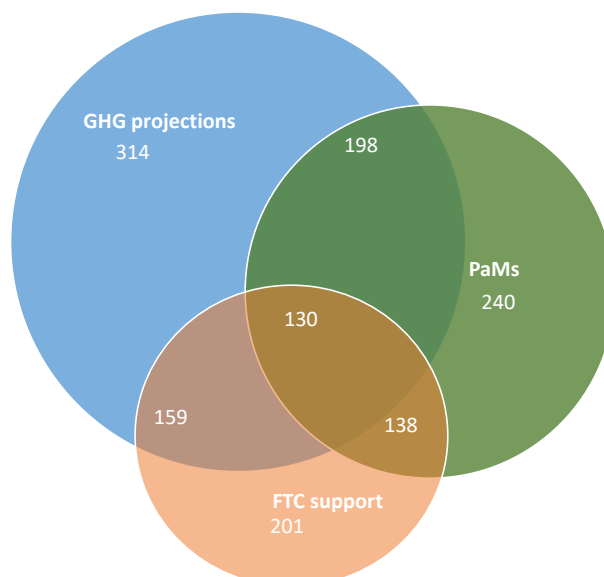
21. Overall, as at 3 August 2021, 240 experts were eligible to review PaMs (120 from Annex I Parties and 120 from non-Annex I Parties), 314 to review GHG emission trends and projections (150 from Annex I Parties and 164 from non-Annex I Parties) and 201 to review

¹³ That is, they have prior experience with NC reviews (if they were nominated to the roster of experts and had participated in NC reviews before 2014), or they have passed the necessary examinations for conducting NC and BR reviews.

the provision of FTC support (64 from Annex I Parties and 137 from non-Annex I Parties), with many having taken examinations in two or three of these areas of expertise. A total of 130 experts are certified to review PaMs, projections and FTC, while 198 are certified to review PaMs and projections, 138 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 5 shows the number of eligible experts by area of expertise.

Figure 5

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



Note: As at 3 August 2021.

III. Eighth meeting of lead reviewers of biennial reports and national communications¹⁴

22. The 8th meeting of LR for the review of BRs and NCs of Annex I Parties was held remotely from 24 to 26 February 2021.¹⁵ A total of 134 experts were invited to the meeting. Of the 104 experts who attended, 49 were from non-Annex I Parties and 55 from Annex I Parties.

23. 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 LR to ensure the consistency of reviews across Parties. In addition, the LR were informed about the status of ongoing consultations with Parties on the ETF and progress in implementing the international consultation and analysis process. The meeting was also an opportunity for the LR to share ideas on preparing for the reviews of the biennial transparency reports under the ETF.

24. The LR noted that the *Reference Manual for the Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement*, a new resource produced in 2021 by the secretariat to enhance understanding of the ETF, has been made publicly available on UNFCCC website.¹⁶ The LR acknowledged the usefulness of continuing discussions on the technical expert review under the ETF at future meetings of LR. The LR also acknowledged that the participation of the co-lead experts for biennial update reports in meetings of LR for the review of BRs and NCs would facilitate shared understanding of implementing technical expert reviews.

¹⁴ This chapter broadly corresponds to the conclusions of the 8th meeting of LR.

¹⁵ See https://unfccc.int/event/8th_BRNC_LRMeeting2021.

¹⁶ UNFCCC. 2021. *Reference Manual for the Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement*. Bonn: UNFCCC. Available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/268136>.

A. Experience from the review of fourth biennial reports

25. The remote reviews continued to be challenging for Parties and the ERTs, in particular owing to fewer opportunities to train new experts, increased limitations in the engagement of reviewers, increased workloads for reviewers and the need to accommodate meetings across different time zones. Once the situation arising from the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic has normalized, the mandated format of the reviews should resume.

26. The LRs noted that, thanks to the commitment of the experts, the cooperation of the Parties subject to the reviews, and the mobilization of resources for and optimization of the review process, most BR4 reviews were accomplished within the mandated timeline, despite the virtual modality of the reviews. Examples of optimizing the review process include allocating more review officers to support reviews; streamlining the review report checklist, template and other tools; and sharing preliminary findings with the Party during the review.

27. The LRs took note of the background paper *Completeness and Transparency Assessment of Information Reported in Technical Review Reports of 4th Biennial Reports – 2021 Update* prepared by the secretariat and acknowledged that the analyses contained therein will facilitate improvements to the review process.¹⁷ On the basis of the results of the analysis presented during the 8th meeting of LRs, the overall completeness and transparency of the information provided in the BR4s has increased compared with the BR3s and the ERT assessments in the technical review reports of the BR4s are highly consistent. The LRs noted that a number of Parties had resubmitted their BR4s as a result of preliminary findings by the ERTs shared with Parties during the review week. The resubmissions further improved the completeness and transparency of information provided in the BRs, albeit the LRs indicated that it was challenging to respond to such resubmissions within the timeline given. The LRs requested the secretariat to continue compiling the review findings, to update the analysis carried out in the background paper taking into account the results of the remaining technical reviews and to present the analysis as an input for discussion during the next meeting of LRs in the context of the update of the review practice guidance.

28. The LRs noted that acknowledging continuous improvements made by Parties and noting recurring reporting issues in their BRs would improve the comprehensiveness of the technical reviews and further assist Parties in improving their reporting. The LRs requested the secretariat to prepare a proposal on how findings on continuous improvements and recurring reporting issues could be addressed for inclusion in the review practice guidance and in the review report templates that will be used during the review of the NC8s and BR5s and to present this proposal during the next meeting of LRs for their consideration.

29. The LRs requested the secretariat to prepare the review practice guidance for 2021¹⁸ by incorporating the approaches discussed and agreed on at the 8th meeting of LRs. These approaches include those for cross-cutting issues and the review areas PaMs, GHG emission trends and projections, and provision of FTC support. The LRs agreed that the review approaches presented in the review practice guidance for 2021 should be applied by the ERTs in future reviews of BRs and NCs.

30. The LRs also requested the secretariat to continue collecting information on and analysing review-related issues raised by the ERTs during reviews of the BR4s in 2021 with a view to presenting them for discussion at the 9th meeting of LRs, to be held in 2022.

¹⁷ UNFCCC. 2021. *Review Practice Guidance: Completeness and Transparency Assessment of Information Reported in Technical review Reports of 4th Biennial Reports – 2021 Update*. Available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/268359>.

¹⁸ UNFCCC. 2021. *Review Practice Guidance 2021: For Reviews of National Communications and Biennial Reports of Developed Country Parties*. Available at <https://unfccc.int/documents/268407>.

B. Preparations for the reviews of fifth biennial reports and eighth national communications

31. The LRs acknowledged the possible approaches presented by the secretariat for the technical assessment by the ERTs of the achievement of Parties' 2020 quantified economy-wide emission reduction targets, and requested the secretariat to prepare a background paper on this matter as an input to a corresponding discussion during the next meeting of LRs.

32. The LRs took note of the changes made to reporting requirements in the revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs, which are to be implemented by Parties for reporting in their NC8s. The LRs requested the secretariat to update the relevant tools to be used for conducting the reviews of the NC8s (e.g. review report template, checklist and review practice guidance) in line with the revised UNFCCC reporting guidelines on NCs.

33. The LRs took note of the results of the comparative analysis of reporting requirements for biennial transparency reports and BRs. The LRs acknowledged the new and different reporting requirements for biennial transparency reports compared with BRs and noted that further discussion on those requirements would be helpful in future meetings of LRs.

C. State of play in the development of the enhanced transparency framework under the Paris Agreement and the international consultation and analysis process

34. The LRs took note of the information presented by the secretariat on the outcomes of the UNFCCC Climate Dialogues 2020, held virtually from 23 November to 4 December 2020, and acknowledged in particular that the methodological work on transparency under the SBSTA is expected to be completed at COP 26.

35. The LRs also took note of the information provided by the secretariat on the continuing implementation of the international consultation and analysis process, which helps developing country Parties gain experience as they transition to implementing the ETF.

IV. Training of reviewers of biennial reports and national communications

36. 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 COP¹⁹ 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.

37. 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.

38. Since the previous annual report to the SBSTA,²⁰ one round of the training programme has been implemented and 523 nominated experts have registered for the training. Online examinations were held from 1 to 3 September 2021, resulting in 81 experts newly qualified to take part in the review of BRs and NCs. Of the 81 experts newly eligible since 2020, 38 are from Annex I Parties and 48 are from non-Annex I Parties. Additionally, 33 experts expanded on or refreshed their knowledge by passing additional examinations.

¹⁹ Decision 19/CP.23, para. 1.

²⁰ FCCC/SBSTA/2020/INF.5.