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UN/CEFACT structure, mandate, terms of reference, and procedures

Terms of Reference for the UN/LOCODE Focal Points

Submitted by the Bureau

Summary

The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) is a five-character code system that provides a coded representation for the names of ports, airports, inland clearance depots, inland freight terminals and other transport related locations which are used for the movement of goods for trade. UN/LOCODE is used extensively throughout the world by the international trade community. The development and maintenance of UN/LOCODE is provided by UNECE as a service to governments and trade in the framework of its trade facilitation programme.

In order to improve the quality of UN/LOCODE, the UNECE is establishing a UN/LOCODE Focal Point Network based upon the official nomination of Focal Points by Member States or by international organizations. The Focal Points' mission, objectives, activities, responsibilities, nomination and funding, together with related activities of the Secretariat, are specified in this Terms of Reference (ToR). This ToR was discussed at the UN/LOCODE Conference organised in April 2015, and the comments made by the experts are reported in this document.

This document is presented to the Plenary for noting*.

* This document is submitted in line with the Programme of work of the UN/CEFACT for 2015-2016
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I. Introduction

1. Trading locations – the places where goods are consigned, shipped, stored, transformed, packaged, declared, inspected, cleared, transhipped and delivered – are essential information without which no international trade transaction can occur. Any mistake or ambiguity on any of the locations through which goods are transiting can have grave consequences for the trader, the government agency, the environment, and the societies concerned.

2. To provide global trade with a unique and unambiguous list of location names, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) introduced in 1981 the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE). UN/LOCODE is a five-character coding system that provides a coded representation of the names of ports, airports, inland clearance depots, inland freight terminals and other transport-related locations which are used for the movement of goods in international trade. Today, UN/LOCODE is widely used by government agencies and private sector entities around the world. It contains over 100,000 location names and is accessible free of charge on the Internet (<http://www.unece.org/cefact/locode/welcome.html>). Any international trade transaction that is conducted today uses UN/LOCODE either in paper documents and/or for the electronic exchange of information.

3. UN/LOCODE is provided by UNECE through its United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) as a service to governments and trade. The standard is defined through UNECE Recommendation No. 16 (http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec16/rec16_3rd_1998_ectrd227.pdf) and is published twice a year. UN/LOCODE is continuously maintained through the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Agency. It was initially envisaged that the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Agency would be responsible for the data maintenance work, while the UN/LOCODE secretariat would take charge of the production and publication of the Directory. However, since 2004, the data maintenance function of the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Agency has been almost entirely suspended and the secretariat has taken on the complete responsibility for data maintenance and production of the UN/LOCODE Directory.

4. Following the launch of the web-based UN/LOCODE Data Maintenance Request system for the online submission of requests for new location codes and for modification in 2004, the number of entries has dramatically increased – from 8000 locations in 1981 to over 100,000 in the 2015-2 issue. As a consequence of the large numbers of location codes and the increased importance of UN/LOCODE for the global trading system, the UN/LOCODE secretariat has called upon Member States and sector-specific international organizations to appoint National Focal Points (NFP) and Institutional Focal Points (IFP), respectively, to participate in the maintenance of UN/LOCODE. The role of these Focal Points is to maintain the location codes under their specific area of competence, support the secretariat in its maintenance work, and advise the secretariat on the further development of the standard.

II. Focal Point mission and objectives

5. UN/LOCODE Focal Points maintain and further develop the UN/LOCODE standard in the best interest of the user community. They support an open, transparent and inclusive maintenance process on an ongoing basis.

6. The Focal Points work under the guidance of the UN/LOCODE secretariat.

A. National Focal Points

7. The mission of the UN/LOCODE National Focal Points is to:

“Improve the quality of UN/LOCODE and support the publication of the standard by establishing a focal point network, revising or updating existing codes (changing and deleting existing codes), and approving new codes in a specified geographic context. National Focal Points will also promote the use of UN/LOCODE and contribute to the further development of the standard.”

8. For regions of the world where there are only a few locations relevant to UN/LOCODE, a single Focal Point may take on responsibility for UN/LOCODE for several countries or a region.

B. Institutional Focal Points

9. Institutional Focal Points are nominated by sector-specific international organizations such as International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Maritime Organization (IMO) and Universal Postal Union (UPU).

10. The mission of the UN/LOCODE Institutional Focal Points is to:

“Improve the quality of UN/LOCODE and support the publication of the standard by establishing a focal point network, revising and updating existing codes (changing and deleting existing codes), and approving new codes in a specified sectorial context. Institutional Focal Points will also harmonize UN/LOCODE and other code lists used by the specific sector, promote the use of UN/LOCODE and contribute to the further development of the standard.”

III. Activities and responsibilities of Focal Points

11. Focal Points will liaise with the UN/LOCODE secretariat and the user community to address all issues related to the UN/LOCODEs covered by their mandate. They will work to ensure a good understanding of the implementation of UNECE Recommendation No. 16 and the maintenance procedure by those using and/or submitting codes. The UN/LOCODE secretariat can assist the Focal Point to build capacity.

12. The main tasks of the Focal Point consist of:

- A one-time review of the existing code list;¹ and
- Bi-annual validation of changes to the code list.

A. One-time review

13. This consists of a one-time review of the existing code list, in particular, with regard to completeness, correctness of names and metadata (subdivision, location function, coordinates), and duplications. Focal Points should aim to complete this review within the first three years of their appointment. Focal Points should inform the secretariat when the review has been completed and send the review results as requested by the secretariat.

¹ Unless otherwise mentioned, ‘code lists’ refers to the codes that are covered by the mandate of the Focal Point.

14. For large code lists², Focal Points are requested to consult with the secretariat on an appropriate schedule in order to avoid a concentration of changes in one single publication.

B. Bi-annual validation of the UN/LOCODE Directory

15. The UN/LOCODE Directory is published two times per year. Prior to each publication, the secretariat will fix a cut-off date for UN/LOCODE Data Maintenance Requests (DMRs). All requests received prior to the cut-off date will be processed for the new publication. After the cut-off date, the secretariat will compile all the DMRs received during the period in question and send them to the relevant Focal Points. Each Focal Point will validate the entries and send them back to the secretariat before a deadline defined by the secretariat.

16. The work essentially involves the validation of new entries and deletions, verifying the correctness of names and metadata (subdivision, location functions), and checking for duplications.

17. The Focal Point will normally have four weeks for this work.

18. The Focal Point will also inform the secretariat and the user community of any potential impact of significant changes (for example, change of name of a large port or airport).

19. The Focal Point will also inform and coordinate with the relevant government agencies to address the potential impact of changes in subdivisions adopted by ISO 3166-2 (Codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions – Part 2: Country subdivision code) in order to minimize corresponding changes to UN/LOCODE

IV. Activities of the UN/LOCODE secretariat

20. The secretariat carries the overall responsibility for the publication of UN/LOCODE. It will maintain a list of Focal Points and make it available on the website (<http://www.unece.org/cefact/locode/focalpoint.html>). It will assist new Focal Points to become operational by providing training and documentation if required. This includes administrative tasks related to Focal Point management, including their nomination and evaluation, and communication with the relevant government agencies through the Missions in Geneva.

21. The secretariat will schedule the publication of the UN/LOCODE directories and will prepare spreadsheets containing the DMRs covered by the mandate of each Focal Point. DMRs related to specific sectors, such as airports with Function 4 and Postal Exchange Office with Function 5, will be validated by the relevant IFPs and subsequently provided to NFPs for information. NFPs must consult with the secretariat on any intended changes to the DMRs already validated by IFPs. The secretariat expects that a DMR validated by a Focal Point will be of the highest quality and can be published as is.

22. The secretariat may organize meetings and conferences to discuss the improvement of the standard.

² Above 500 entries.

V. Nomination of Focal Points and participation

23. A Focal Point is a person or a group of persons working under the authority of a government agency or an international organization.

24. The secretariat sends requests for nomination of National Focal Points to the Permanent Missions of United Nations Member States. Nationally recognised bodies (such as National Trade Facilitation Bodies or Ministries) that are interested in becoming a NFP may contact the secretariat directly, in which case the secretariat will liaise with the relevant Mission.

25. If a Focal Point can no longer continue its role, the country should appoint a new Focal Point and inform the secretariat in writing. In this case, the outgoing Focal Point should make proper handover arrangements with the incoming Focal Point.

26. Focal Points should establish internal arrangements for back-up in case of absence (illness, holiday, etc.).

27. Upon its discretion, the secretariat may cease collaboration with Focal Points that fail to fulfil their responsibilities.

VI. Funding

28. The appointment and work arrangements of the Focal Points, including funding, are the responsibility of the relevant national government or international organization.

29. The work of the UN/LOCODE secretariat falls under United Nations Regular Budget Activities.

Annex I

UN/LOCODE National Focal Point Form

Country

Agency Name

Address

Name of
Contact Person

Title

E-mail

Telephone and Fax

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Annex II

UN/LOCODE Maintenance Technical Guide for Focal Points

The training material for UN/LOCODE Focal Points, together with the technical guide, is available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41503#/>).
