

2nd Meeting of the UNECE Initiative on “Gender Responsive Standards”

28th November 2017 – Palais des Nations

Minutes of the meeting

1. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following organizations: the British Standards Institution (BSI), CRC4change, the Central Bureau of Statistics of Israel, the German National Metrology Institute, the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Gender Champions, the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), the Matej Bel University, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council of Ireland, the Permanent Mission of Israel to the UN and International Organizations, the Swedish Standards Institute, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
2. They represented a diverse group of stakeholders and a large pool of expertise. While introducing themselves, the participants outlined how their organizations’ work is related to the meeting. They also expressed their strong support for the initiative.
3. The discussion focused on how to mainstream gender in standards-related activities and particularly in the standards-setting process, and how the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative could further that goal. The Secretary of the Working Party said that standards and technical regulations could play an important role in the realization of SDG Goal 5.5, and advocated for increased gender responsiveness and inclusiveness throughout their development, use and review. She described the results of the UNECE gender-responsive standards initiative in the past year and plans for further activities going forward.
4. Then she invited the representative of the BSI to introduce "Pledge for Action on Gender Responsive Standards" (“the Pledge”). The representative of the BSI explained that the aim of the Pledge is to assist national standards bodies and standards developing organizations (NSBs and SDOs) in identifying actions they can take to support the creation of gender responsive standards. To achieve this goal, three entry points are: improving the gender balance of those participating in standards development, ensuring that the content of standards is gender responsive, and ensuring that standards are gender responsive when implemented. She presented in detail the actions that
5. She also mentioned that one difficulty is to find women with technical expertise. Recent years have witnessed an increase of women with technical expertise who are participating in the standards setting process, yet there is still room for improvement. Moreover, technical expertise is not the only relevant expertise. NSBs and SDOs should consider various factors, and make sure that all stakeholders are involved in the process.
6. Participants discussed gender expertise and agreed that gender experts are should be able to identify gender bias, and propose solutions that are tailored to a

specific context to ensure gender inclusiveness and responsiveness. Then the participants expressed the following thoughts regarding gender experts:

- To ensure that standards are gender responsive, NSBs and SDOs need to include gender experts in the standard setting and implementation process. They can establish a mechanism where gender experts and technical committees work together, or to ensure the availability of the gender experts so that the technical committees are able to consult them on relevant matters.
- Including gender experts in standards setting and implementation is of great importance, since the mere inclusion of women does not necessarily mean the inclusion of a gender perspective.
- It is also important to institutionalize the inclusion of gender experts, and establish a process to ensure their participation. NSBs and SDOs should make the inclusive practice long-lasting and sustainable.

7. Another topic discussed by the participants is how to engage national standards bodies. The representative of the BSI explained that the approach for the Pledge should be more “carrot” than “stick”. The initiative aims at encouraging NSBs and SDOs to take actions so that the initiative can evaluate the outcomes to inform further development. It is hoped that effective actions or processes can be institutionalized within NSBs and SDOs. Other participants made the following suggestions:

- Communication is the key. Gender inclusiveness is a state of mind. The initiative needs to persuade NSBs to change their state of mind, which can only be achieved through sufficient communication. It is crucial to start the conversation with NSBs as soon as possible, and communicate with other international organizations, especially institutions that have engaged in similar activities, to further explore opportunities for cooperation.
- The initiative should continue to engage interested parties, formally as well as informally and use their feedback to improve the Pledge. As the Pledge commitments are implemented, the experience gained in doing so could be showcased to other NSBs and SDOs.
- Large gatherings of NSBs and SDOs, such as the ISO General Assembly or the IEC Annual Meetings, could be used to progress the conversation, if gender matters could be included into the agenda.
- The Pledge, could be more focused, and communicate a clearer message. For example, the definition of gender experts can be included in the Pledge document.
- The messages conveyed to NSBs and SDOs should endeavour to make them recognize the connection between gender and their institutions. Additionally, instead of pointing out the inadequacies of NSBs and SDOs, the message should focus on how to help them to design and implement gender responsive standards. For example, the International Labour Organization communicates with countries’ delegations, offering assistance to them and actively follows up to help institutions achieve gender balance in their activities.

8. The participants also made the following suggestions on how to mainstream gender in the standards setting process:

- Another perspective is to look at gender issues from a broader perspective – human rights. Gender actions are more and more incorporated into human rights action. Positioning gender in a broader context may attract more audience, which might facilitate awareness raising and communication.
 - To involve interested actors who lack resources and means to participate, one suggestion is a culture change that promotes long-distance meetings in place of meeting in person. In this way, meetings might be more accessible to women and representatives from developing countries.
 - Regarding the list of actions suggested by the Pledge, it would be beneficial to have a vision, accompanied by goals and deadlines to achieve these goals.
 - The Pledge could benefit from a feedback system that allows interested actors to comment on the draft of the Pledge.
 - Measure and evaluation are indispensable. It is easier to measure the impact of the Pledge if relevant database designed by experts are available. When analysing the data, in addition to numbers and percentages, the statistics should be looked into in light of the social-economic situation of a country or region.
9. The participants reviewed the Pledge. Some participants made several suggestions to make the wording clearer and more positive. After the discussion, a revised version of the Pledge was agreed by the participants. The Pledge is expected to be improved during the next year, to seek formal endorsement, and to open for countries to pledge at a further date.