

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

What **UNECE** does for you



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better and convergent
regulations

Exporting a product to more than one country can be like navigating a complex maze, because of different and sometimes conflicting regulations. Even in sectors where regulations are similar, importing authorities may require additional testing before the product can be sold on their national market. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) works to lower costly barriers to trade, protect consumers' and workers' safety, and preserve the natural environment.

Lorenza Jachia, Secretary of the Working Party, talks about her work.



What is the purpose of your work?

Our purpose is to enhance cooperation among rule makers and enforcement authorities to protect consumers and workers from the threats of non-compliant and dangerous products and equipment. We try to reduce the costs of trade – especially for small and medium enterprises – by ensuring that products do not need to be customized or tested several times to reach national markets. We also strive to protect the natural environment by promoting the use of innovative products. We encourage development by bringing international standards and the knowledge they embody to the production floor. To achieve these goals, we promote the convergence

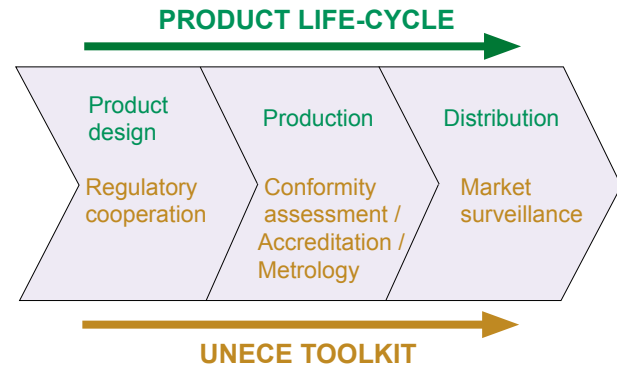
of technical regulations with international standards and best practice.

What do you mean by technical regulations?

Technical regulations define the features of a product that will be commercialized. They are important at all stages of a product's life-cycle: from the design, through the production and the distribution.

Why are these regulations important?

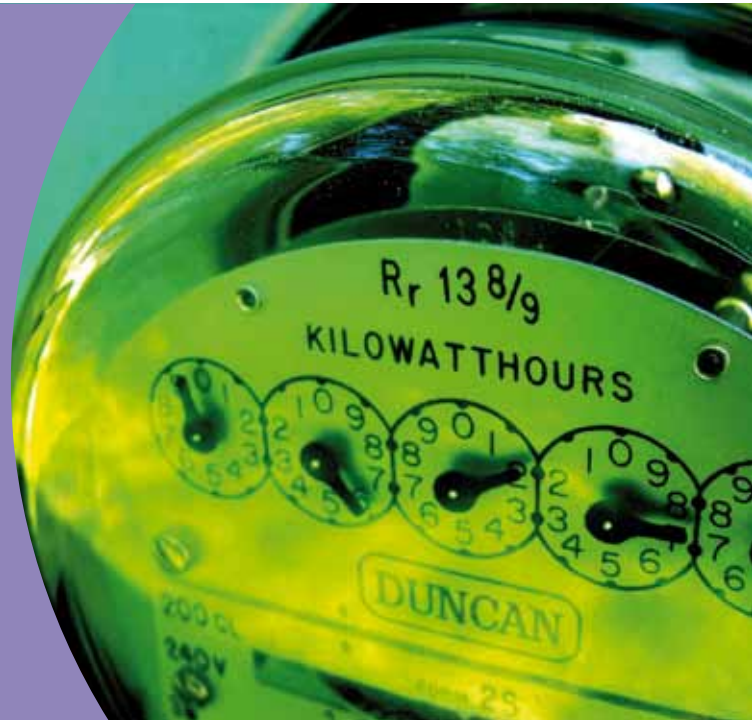
A product design is guided by technical regulations. At each stage of production, conformity is assessed. Finally, market surveillance authorities use technical regulations to check that commercialized products meet the mandatory requirements.



What happens when technical regulations are different across countries?

Technical regulations could never be valid for the whole world because they express a country's unique needs and circumstances. Clearly when regulations differ, manufacturers will need to invest considerable resources to understand the rules, and tailor their merchandise accordingly. In some cases, producers will also need to obtain a certificate of conformity for each national market.

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What is a certificate of conformity?

A certificate of conformity is an official document that guarantees that a product has been inspected, verified and is in accordance with the technical regulations in force where the product is marketed.

Are these certificates recognized internationally?

This is an important question. In some sectors, although technical regulations are similar, a certificate of conformity is still required to enter each market. Obtaining one is costly, especially for countries not equipped with internationally accredited laboratories and test houses. This accumulation of certificates does not always deliver an optimal level of protection to the end-user.

What solutions do you envisage?

According to the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement of the World Trade Organization, technical rules should not be used as barriers to trade. We encourage rule makers to base their regulations on international standards.

Why do you recommend that authorities make reference to international standards in technical regulations?

International standards combine the knowledge and expertise of producers, consumers, market surveillance authorities, testing houses, certification and accreditation bodies, as well as leading scientists, academics and environmental specialists. During the standards-development process, viewpoints from all countries receive a fair hearing and no one interest group dominates. Additionally, international standards are revised and updated regularly to fulfil the public safety needs of industrial development. As such,

standards should be tools of first recourse to guarantee safety, efficiency and environmental conservation.

Is reference to international standards in regulations sufficient to facilitate trade?

No, it isn't. That's why the Working Party adopted a Recommendation that enshrines an International Model, i.e. a set of principles and procedures that countries can implement to approximate their technical regulations. At the core of the Model is the concept of Common Regulatory Objectives (CROs). For each sector, these objectives address legitimate Government concerns related to public health, safety or protection of the environment. CROs are defined preferably with reference to international standards. They specify: (a) how compliance is assessed; (b) which conformity assessment bodies are recognized as competent, and (c) what competence criteria are to be fulfilled, as well as other related issues.

Are these CROs binding for countries that sign them?

No. Authorities should transpose the CROs into national technical regulations at their discretion. Once this is done, products that have been assessed in the exporting country as compliant with the CROs can automatically be sold in other markets with no further assessment.

Has the International Model been used?

Yes. Three initiatives have been launched on

telecom products, earth-moving machinery and equipment for explosive environments. In particular, CROs were adopted by the Working Party in 2003 for some telecom equipment: personal computers (PCs); PC peripherals, legacy Public Switched Telephone Network (PSTN) terminals; Bluetooth, Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN); Global Standard for Mobile Telecommunication (GSM); and International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT-2000 or «3G»). For earth-moving machinery, CROs were adopted in 2004. The initiative on equipment for explosive environments is currently in the process of finalizing its first draft CRO. Another initiative on pipeline safety has been proposed.

How do the sectoral initiatives work?

In practice, when countries wish to harmonize their technical regulations in a specific sector according to the International Model, they announce their intention through a Call for Participation



and invite all United Nations Member States to join their initiative. The process typically starts with a survey of existing regulations in the relevant sector in the different jurisdictions. It aims to identify possible building blocks for CROs.

What is the role of the UNECE secretariat in this process?

The secretariat provides assistance in the negotiations process and promotes implementation of the CROs. We work closely with United Nations Member States, but also with standards-setting organizations, certification bodies, test houses, international schemes for conformity assessment, business, civil society, and other international organizations. It is important that all stakeholders share their knowledge and their concerns.

Who benefits from this work? Why do these activities belong in the United Nations?

Governments benefit because they can find optimal tools to achieve their regulatory objectives. Industries face lower transaction costs and can compete on a fairer basis in larger markets. Finally, consumers, workers and the environment are protected more effectively from hazards. The activities of the Working Party therefore contribute to achieving the core objectives of the United Nations. In the end, better and convergent technical regulations benefit everybody.

For more information, visit
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