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Facilitated discussion on future direction of work on “Standards and sustainable development”

Report on the evaluation of UNECE’s support to the advancement of Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies *

**Excerpt of the evaluation report, submitted as received from the
consultant in charge of the evaluation**

Summary

This document is an excerpt of the sub-programme level evaluation for UNECE’s Working Party 6 on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardisation Policies. It is submitted in the same form as it was received from the consultant in charge of the evaluation, for decision by Member States at the next Annual Session of the Working Party.

I. Executive Summary

1. This is an independent sub-programme level evaluation for UNECE’s Trade sub-programme, the area which was identified for the 2018-2019 evaluation work plan, in particular Working Party 6

* This document is submitted late due to the inputs received during and after the annual session of WP6 from 20-22 November 2019



on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardisation Policies. The purpose of this evaluation is to review UNECE's support to the advancement of Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies to member States (Working Party 6) towards achieving the 2030 Agenda with a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of women. This evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact of Working Party 6 in supporting member States to reduce technical barriers to trade and increase regulatory coherence in sectors that have a critical impact on sustainable development. The scope encompasses all activities undertaken under the auspices of Working Party 6 from January 2015 to December 2018. UNECE's geographical scope covers 56 member States located in Europe, North America,¹ the Caucasus,² Central Asia³ and Western Asia⁴. However, many of its standards and legal instruments are used worldwide, and a number of countries outside the region participate in UNECE's normative work. This includes Working Party 6's normative work, as well as some of the normative work in the following subprogrammes: Environment, Statistics, Sustainable Energy, Transport⁵. With respect to methodology, the evaluation used a mix of data sources: (i) primary data collection through survey questionnaires and in-depth key informant interviews; and (ii) secondary data through a desk review of project documents and other relevant materials. The evaluation uses both quantitative and qualitative data. Data analysis has used triangulation where possible. The evaluator has used gender analysis and a human rights based approach, in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards.

2. Regarding relevance the evaluation found that the work of Working Party 6 (i) has met the needs that its targets and beneficiaries have expressed and agreed to; (ii) is consistent with the mandate of the Trade sub-programme and its established mandates; (iii) is highly relevant for the broad variety of partnerships it maintains; (iv) the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative is highly relevant with respect to gender equality and empowerment of women; and (v) incorporated the perspective of vulnerable groups in the design of recommendations well with respect to women and persons with disabilities. In terms of effectiveness, the evaluation found that Working Party 6 has achieved positive outcomes in all its areas of intervention. Working Party 6's efforts have added value in respect of providing an impartial platform for engagement, a forum for best practices in its thematic areas, and increasing accessibility to standards for middle income countries and countries with economies in transition. Challenges to achieving the activities' objective and expected accomplishments included resource constraints, limited participation of member States and other stakeholders and limited engagement between meetings, implementation and the challenges of enforcement of voluntary standards, and the lack of understanding of various stakeholders of the linkages between standards, sustainable development, and gender equality.

3. With respect to **efficiency**, the evaluation found that the relationship between cost (in terms of funds and time) and results was reasonable, given the breadth of the mandate, and the nature and volume of accomplishments compared to the budget and human resources. However, mindful of the budgetary constraints, it found that there are insufficient resources to achieve the intended outcomes.

4. Concerning **sustainability**, the evaluation found that it was not likely that the benefits of the normative work would continue after completion and without overburdening partner institutions.⁶ There was low participation of partners and beneficiaries at annual meetings of the Working Party and at regular meetings of advisory bodies by a broad range of stakeholders, including due to language and time zone barriers for some participants. Engagement between meetings was challenging due to time and financial resources of participants and experts, many of whom participate

¹ Canada and USA

² Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia

³ Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

⁴ Israel

⁵ <https://www.unece.org/info/where-we-work/where-we-work.html>

⁶ With beneficiary countries needing support to implement Working Party 6 best practice and recommendations.

on a *pro bono* basis, noting this is similar to other UNECE Working Parties. There was medium to high ownership of the outcomes of the work.

5. Regarding **impact**, the evaluation found that Working Party 6 has made a positive contribution within UNECE, particularly through the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative, and the Standards for the SDGs project (funded by extra-budgetary resources), both of which illustrate for colleagues the wider relevance of standards for internationally agreed global goals for the 2030 Agenda and the UN Secretariat's policy of gender mainstreaming. There has been no significant negative impact of the normative work. The outcomes of the Working Party have led to new policies or policy changes in member States in key areas including market surveillance, regulatory cooperation, gender responsive standards, and equipment for explosive environments. Likewise, countries outside of the Europe region have used the Recommendations and other deliverables of Working Party 6, including in regulatory cooperation, gender inclusive standards, risk management, disaster risk resilience, and standards for the SDGs, illustrating the impact of Working Party 6 beyond the UNECE member States. The Gender Responsive Standards Initiative has strengthened the application of gender mainstreaming principles in the development of standards and technical regulations, through raising awareness, and by encouraging the development of gender action plans. However, it is too early to judge whether there have been substantial and meaningful changes in the situation of most vulnerable groups, although there have been positive steps forward and certainly great potential for influence regarding women, people with disabilities, and people living in disaster prone areas.

6. Recommendations have been made based upon the evaluation findings and conclusions, and developed in consultation with stakeholders.

II. Recommendations

7. Following are the recommendations:

- (i) Update and reflect the work of Working Party 6 in line with the 2030 Agenda, which was adopted by UN Member States in 2015. Review and update the terms of reference of Working Party 6 in line with the Guidelines for the Establishment and Functioning of Working Parties within UNECE (ECE/EX/1 paragraph 3(d) – see Annex) to assess and propose necessary adjustments to the mandate and status of Working Party 6, and submit to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards;
- (ii) Take steps to formally establish START-ed and the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative, in line with the agreed guidance and procedures in Annex F;
- (iii) Find ways to address inclusion and participation in Working Party 6 advisory groups.⁷ This could include (i) increasing representation of women in all Working Party 6 advisory groups to increase input of women in the standards development process, to improve gender balance in these bodies, and to enhance expertise to create and deliver gender inclusivity; (ii) setting up a system of regional hubs or rotating the timing of advisory group virtual meetings so that participants in time zones different to Europe may be more easily included;
- (iv) Explore ways to address resource constraints, for example, by making full use of the resources assigned to Working Party 6, considering redistribution of resources within the Section, interns from Master's programmes on standardization, and extra-budgetary projects with project funded project managers;

⁷ Advisory Group on Market Surveillance (MARS), Group on Education and Standardisation (START-Ed), Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems (GRM), Standardisation and Regulatory Techniques (START).

- (v) Seek partnerships with a broad range of women's organisations, including those representing vulnerable groups of women, in each thematic area and advisory group to seek their perspectives, address their needs, and to reach those furthest behind; and
 - (vi) In order to present the findings of the two most recent Working Party 6 initiatives, consider developing a publication on Gender Responsive Standards and the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on SDG 5 as a standalone and cross cutting goal to showcase how standards contribute to achievement of gender equality, gender mainstreaming, and achievement of the SDGs in the UNECE region.
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