Economic Commission for Europe

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Report from the secretariat

Report on activities of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group since its fourth annual meeting

Summary

In keeping with the practice of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group and according to the decisions made at its fourth annual meeting, the secretariat prepared a report detailing the activities undertaken by the Group since the fourth annual meeting. The Group is invited to review the report and to provide comments.

The full report provides a summary of the major activities conducted by the Group and the developments related to UN/LOCODE in the business community, such as cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to supporting combat against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, the UN/LOCODE maintenance and the UN/LOCODE new system developed in the UN/LOCODE Re-engineering Project.

I. Introduction

1.   The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) identifies locations uniquely and unambiguously for international trade and transport. It is a five-character code where the first two characters represent the International Standards Organization (ISO) country code followed by a three-character code unique within that country.

2.   As specified in its Terms of Reference (ToRs), the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group advises and supports the UNECE secretariat and UN/CEFACT for the maintenance and further development of UN/LOCODE.

3.   The UNECE EXCOM endorsed the establishment of the Group in June 2017. Its first annual meeting took place in Geneva from 30 November to 1 December 2017; its second annual meeting was held in Hangzhou, China, on 25-26 October 2018; its third annual meeting was held in Xiamen, China, on 27-28 November 2019; its fourth annual meeting was held online on 27 November 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.   Despite difficulties and challenges caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic since the beginning of 2020, with the support of the secretariat, based on the decisions made at the fourth annual meeting, the Group has taken the following activities to provide better services to the user community.

II. Overview of recent relevant developments

5.   UN/LOCODE Directory 2020-2 and 2021-1 have been generated by the current UN/LOCODE system and published on the UNECE website as scheduled[1].

6.   The secretariat has made an ongoing effort to enhance the UN/LOCODE Focal Point Network. Since the last annual meeting, the Network has been expanded by the new nominations of Djibouti, Guinea, Israel and Saudi Arabia, and the re-nominations of India, Japan, Pakistan and Sweden[2].

7.   The secretariat attended the Third Meeting of the Parties to the 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) from 31 May to 4 June 2021. The concept paper (UN/LOCODE-AG/2020/INF.3) was drafted jointly by the UNECE and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) secretariats and approved at the last annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group as a general policy to support the inclusion and maintenance of all PSMA-designated ports in UN/LOCODE for combat against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. The FAO secretariat reported it to the PSMA meeting and raised the discussion on guidance sought from the PSMA Parties on whether the UN/LOCODE should be introduced as a mandatory requirement when registering PSMA-designated ports in the FAO PSMA electronic system. Whilst several delegations were positive to it, one Party raised concerns. Therefore, the discussion will be diverted to the FAO Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE) scheduled in 2022.

8.   A questionnaire was conducted by FAO to review and assess the effectiveness of the PSMA, which was open for a period of three months from December 2020 to February 2021. The results of the questionnaire were shared at the meeting mentioned above[3]. A question concerning the allocation of UN/LOCODE to PSMA-designated ports was included in the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire indicate that just over half of Parties' designated ports have been allocated a UN/LCOODE. Parties agreed that the questionnaire would be completed every four years. Considering the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group Decision 20-2 concerning the inclusion and maintenance

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[1] http://www.unece.org/cefact/locode/welcome.html
[2] http://www.unece.org/cefact/locode/focalpoint.html
[3] http://www.fao.org/3/nf561en/nf561en.pdf

of all PSMA-designated ports in UN/LOCODE, the secretariat will follow up with FAO on the progress and inform the Group when the results of the next questionnaire are out.

9.   As a follow-up to Decision 20-3, the secretariat drafted a study paper jointly with FAO on the use of UN/LOCODE for the FAO Global Record in support of combat against IUU fishing by expanding inclusion and maintenance of PSMA-designed ports in UN/LOCODE to the rest of Global Record ports. The FAO Global Record is to become the backbone of international fisheries management, as it provides the vertebral column of any fisheries information system, the fleet record, to which all other information will have to be invariably connected. It is thus expected to support the implementation of the PSMA. The paper (UNLOCODE-AG/2021/INF.3) is submitted to the fifth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group for decision.

10.   The United Nations Global Platform[4] was established by the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) as a collaborative environment to work together as a global community and to learn together by sharing knowledge, data and methods for all countries in the world. The Task Team in automated identification system (AIS) data analyses the usage of data coming from the AIS which is a signaling (sensor) system of vessels to share various information about ships' location, speed, and status and other relevant information. The secretariat liaised with UN DESA to make a presentation on the activities of the AIS Task Team at the fifth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group to explore potential collaboration with the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group.

11.   The liaison with the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) was established last year. As a follow-up to Decision 20-6, the secretariat invited the UNGEGN secretariat to share UNGEGN's ongoing work at the fifth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group, including the outcome of its 2021 session, its programme of work and an update on the World Geographic Names Database that is currently undergoing redevelopment.

12.   Because of the dependency on ISO 3166-1 and ISO 3166-2, the secretariat participates in the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency and ISO TC 046/WG2. The ISO Technical Management Board finally approved the revised Terms of Reference for the ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency in May 2021. The secretariat observed many changes in the 2020 updates of ISO 3166-2 issued in November 2020, which was driven by a full review of the content carried out in 2020. Any changes in ISO 3166-2 might cause a negative impact on UN/LOCODE because of the lack of a mechanism to automatically update the relevant UN/LOCODE entries.

III.   Country code for Northern Ireland in UN/LOCODE

13.   The secretariat had been receiving queries regarding the requirement for a code to distinguish locations in Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom (UK) after Brexit from key stakeholders in European Union countries.

14.   The ISO 3166 Maintenance Agency discussed the topic at its 44th meeting in May 2021 to clarify the situation regarding the codes for UK and its subdivisions, in particular, the situation regarding Northern Ireland following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. ISO 3166 currently contains an ISO 3166-1 country code "GB" for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. ISO 3166-2 lists the administrative subdivisions. Nowhere are the four constituent parts of the United Kingdom coded in ISO 3166. It was proposed that England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland could be included as parent subdivisions for the administrative subdivisions in 3166-2. It was noted that GB and EU had agreed to use user-assigned codes XI (for Northern Ireland) and XU (for GB minus Northern Ireland).

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[4] https://unstats.un.org/bigdata/un-global-platform.cshtml

15.   The secretariat prepared a general note (UN/LOCODE-AG/2021/INF.4) to clarify the coding situation, especially the agreement reached between GB and EU for Union goods[5] and propose options to be taken in UN/LOCODE and followed up with the UN/LOCODE National Focal Point for UK for his comments. The issue needs to be raised at the fifth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group for decision.

IV.   UN/LOCODE maintenance

16.   The UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team validated the UN/LOCODE Data Maintenance Requests (DMRs), led by two co-convenors - one from the public sector and the other from the private sector - and with substantive support provided by the secretariat.

17.   The co-convenor from the private sector, Mr. Bertrand Geoffray, informed the secretariat of his decision to leave this position at the end of 2021. The Bureau of International Containers (BIC) has expressed its interest to continue providing resources to the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team and engaged to identify an expert prior to the departure of Mr. Geoffrey. The secretariat expresses gratitude to Mr. Bertrand Geoffray for his great contribution to the UN/LOCODE maintenance work and thanks BIC for its continuous support to this important task.

18.   Mr. Geoffrey and the BIC secretariat also suggested nominating one or two deputies for the co-convenor position who could chair a maintenance meeting in case the co-convenors are not available. After consultation with the Chair and the Vice-Chair, the secretariat calls for volunteers as deputies of the co-convenor from the private sector. Interested experts should contact the secretariat or co-convenors of the Maintenance Team.

19.   The new maintenance procedure aims to improve the data quality of UN/LOCODE by the consistent understanding of Recommendation 16 and the application of validation rules. It is a beneficial use of the collaboration of an international team of experts, consisting of nominated UN/LOCODE Focal Points, industry experts, and the secretariat, and the valuable resources of both the public sector and the private sector.

20.   The UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team conducts its work via online meetings. All team members are welcome to attend the weekly meeting at their convenience. It is not an obligation to participate in all the meetings. The secretariat aims to schedule the maintenance meetings to facilitate the participation of team members in all time zones.

21.   The COVID-19 pandemic prevented the secretariat from organizing a face-to-face meeting during the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) Forum (Decision 19-07). The secretariat organized two online maintenance meetings during the UN/CEFACT Forum in October 2021.

22.   Despite COVID-19 imposed challenges, the Maintenance Team tried to complete the DMR validation and contributed to the publication of the releases 2020-2 and 2021-1 as scheduled.

23.   Under the new procedure, the Maintenance Team established the practice to invite the DMR submitters to join the meeting to explain and justify their requests. It provides a platform to communicate directly between the DMR validators and the DMR submitters. In this way, the submitters get to know the UN/LOCODE inclusion criteria and avoid spam submissions in the future. As a result, the amount of inferior-quality DMRs decreased dramatically.

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[5] Union goods comprise products manufactured in the EU and in free circulation within the Union. Union goods can be transferred within the EU without any customs formalities.

24.   Following Decision 20-9, a further study is necessary to clarify the maintenance issues which were mentioned and not yet addressed at the last annual meeting. The secretariat recognized the importance of having a platform to discuss and address the maintenance issues, which are raised by the Maintenance Team on an ongoing basis, by putting maintenance policies in place in line with the revised Recommendation 16. However, the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team, which focuses on the individual DMR validation, is not able to address the issues at the policy level. Therefore, the secretariat prepared the Terms of Reference (ToRs) for a task force. The task force will conduct its work by designing, circulating, and analyzing a questionnaire that includes the maintenance issues raised by the Maintenance Team and finally reporting its findings and proposals to the Advisory Group for decisions. The secretariat also drafted the first questionnaire available for discussion at the fifth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group (UN/LOCODE-AG/2021/INF.5).

25.   The UN/LOCODE National Focal Point for Brazil completed a full review during the first semester of 2021 based on many databases available publicly on the websites of Brazilian public organizations. Through thousands of DMRs, in release 2021-2, it is anticipated to contain 5633 entries for Brazil, including all the 5570 municipalities, the biggest ports and airports that have already their codes, and 40 Floating Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) oil platforms (with function 7). As requested, the announcement of such big changes is available in the secretariat note published with release 2021-1. The secretariat appreciates the excellent work done by the National Focal Point for Brazil and encourages him to share best practices, experience, expertise, and lessons to learn with other Focal Points.

V.   UN/LOCODE Re-engineering Project

26.   As a positive response to Decision 18-08, the new UN/LOCODE system developed through the UN/LOCODE Re-engineering Project, was presented at the fourth annual meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group. It was decided to launch it in the first half of 2021.

27.   The secretariat is addressing a kind of administrative issue internally to put the new system in production as soon as possible with the support of the Information Systems Unit of UNECE and keep the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group posted on new outcomes.

28.   In October 2021, the new UN/LOCODE system was cleared for production release from the cybersecurity perspective by the Office of Information & Communications Technology at United Nations Headquarters in New York after passing a professional, complicated, and comprehensive information security audit. It turned out that the new system is technically ready to be launched.

29.   The secretariat noticed that stakeholders are interested in the Application Programming Interface (API) provided in the new system because of the queries from the different key stakeholders. As a pilot implementation of API, the project team continued to work with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to exchange data between the new UN/LOCODE system and the new module in the Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS), based on the API specification agreed at the last annual meeting.

30.   As part of the data migration task from the legacy system to the new system, the UN/LOCODE Re-engineering Project team cross-checked the official code list of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) to identify the International Mail Processing Centers (IMPCs). UPU uses a six-character code system, and the first five-character code is UN/LOCODE. The project team found out that half of UN/LOCODEs used by IMPCs codes are without Function 5, which specifies that the location has IMPC facilities. What's more, almost 30 UN/LOCODEs used by IMPCs don't exist anymore. The secretariat strongly recommends that UPU register the IMPC codes in the UN/LOCODE

Child Code repository on the UNECE website [6] and maintain data synchronization between the IMPC codes and UN/LOCODE.

VI. Call to Action

31.   The circular economy is a new and inclusive economic paradigm, that aims to minimize pollution and waste, extend product lifecycles, and enable broad sharing of physical and natural assets. Recognizing the role of circularity in promoting sustainability, the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) of UNECE identified five entry points in promoting circularity in the UNECE region: (i) waste management and reduction; (ii) sustainable procurement; (iii) traceability of value chains; (iv) standards and regulatory frameworks and (v) efficiency of trade and logistics chains.

32.   The secretariat calls to action in the UN/LOCODE user community to explore the possibility of expanding the use of UN/LOCODE to the circular economy, especially the entry points mentioned above.

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[6] https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/unlocode-child-code-repository