

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)

Annual session of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI)

Geneva, 24 November 2021

Report of Gender Responsive Standards Initiative on its annual session

I. Introduction

1. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) held its Annual Session of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) on 24 November 2021, from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM.
2. Experts from the following United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States attended: Canada, Germany, France, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Representatives of the European Commission (EC) were also present. Experts from the following non-ECE member States attended Argentina, Australia, Costa Rica, India, Rwanda, Mauritius, and New Zealand.
3. The following United Nations bodies and international organizations participated: the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The following inter- and non-governmental organizations participated: the African Organisation for Standardization (ARSO), European Committee for Standardization & the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CEN-CENELEC), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO).
4. Participants also included representatives of private sector companies, associations, academia, and civil society organizations from various United Nations regions.

II. Adoption of the agenda

5. The Lead of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative presented the agenda, which was adopted without amendment. Participants were encouraged to make contributions toward the discussion, via the online chat function, and report their activities in the open floor segment of the meeting.

III. Panel session

6. The Standards Development Manager of the British Standards Institution (BSI) underlined some of the recent developments within the standards body related to gender responsiveness and occupational health & safety (OH&S) management standards. The speaker contextualised the application of OH&S management standards, noting that gender responsiveness and wider issues of diversity are garnering greater attention, with gender being actively addressed in the revision of ISO 45001. The standard enables organisations to build an overarching system, which addresses all types of OH&S risks.

7. The speaker underscored the importance of ISO 45003 (Psychological health and safety) and ISO PAS 45005 (General guidelines for safe working during the COVID-19 pandemic), which has a specific clause on inclusivity – but not explicitly gender. Psychological ill-health is a neglected issue, which has been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. It is vital that the lessons of the pandemic inform long-term OH&S performance and inspire organisations to adopt a holistic view in the management of employee wellbeing.

8. The President of the Institution of Occupation Safety & Health (IOSH) explained the role of the organisation in supporting members to create workplaces. As the largest professional health and safety membership organisation, IOSH is uniquely placed to lead the discussion in global occupational safety and health. The speaker presented the organisation's "Catch the Wave" campaign, which strives to harness the power of social sustainability and ensure occupational health and safety. This is suggested as the foundation of a sustainable business model. In line with the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the campaign prioritises people alongside environmental concerns. The speaker encouraged participants to engage with the campaign and drew attention to the IOSH resources and tools which enable effective measurement, monitoring and reporting on social sustainability within an organisation.

9. The Project Leader of ISO 30415:2021 (Human Resource Management – Diversity and Inclusion) stressed the importance of the newly published standard in enabling greater diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The speaker underscored how the standard is scalable and presents a foundation for businesses across all sectors – irrespective of size or type – to develop an inclusive workplace and leverage all of the associated benefits of this. By presenting fundamental prerequisites for diversity and inclusion, including recommended actions, responsibilities and measures, the standard improves personal experiences across the employment lifecycle. The framework is designed to be flexible, adapted to the respective needs of the organisation, with the fundamental objective of driving change in the business.

10. The representative of the Technical Standards Institute of Costa Rica (INTECO) discussed the national experience of implementing gender-responsive standards for an inclusive workplace. The speaker highlighted the disproportionate rates of female unemployment, the gendered nature of unpaid care and domestic work, and noted the persistent gender gap in decision-making positions (i.e., only 3/10 directors or managers in the private sector are women).

11. In support of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), INTECO developed the national standard INTE G38:2015, which has recently been updated to INTE G38:2021. Developed jointly with the National Institute of Women, the standard supports organisations to work on gender equality issues. By providing three different schemes of certification, the standard encourages gender equality through affirmative actions and effective management systems. Management commitment is critical to the successful adoption and implementation of INTE G38:2021 and organisations are encouraged to develop and implement gender equality policies and action plans.

13. The Lead of the Initiative opened the floor for questions and received a question on how to bring more women into the workplace. The President of IOSH discussed the challenges associated with greater inclusivity, including a quota mechanism, sponsorship and mentorship. The speaker noted that quota schemes present secondary challenges and how IOSH's programmes look to support those women who may be less extrovert, but equally capable.

14. Citing the experience of developing ISO 30415, the Project Leader noted how this very question emerged. In the human resources management lifecycle, there is both an aspect of recruitment and onboarding which are crucial. The speaker expressed solidarity with the point made by the IOSH President and underscored the need to include everyone, and a matter of being systematic in inclusivity, with a particular focus on recruitment and the inclusion of women.

15. A question was posed regarding the biggest challenges associated with bringing the need for gender-responsive standards to the fore within organisations. The Standards Development Manager of the British Standards Institution (BSI) noted several challenges including: (i) the opinion of experts that are already inclusive, highlight the gap between intention and lived reality; (ii) people do not have an accurate understanding of women's experience of standards; and (iii) the mistaken belief that this is a minority concern. The speaker underscored the need for more data, and greater inclusion of gender expertise coming to talk to technical committees.

16. The role of Meeting Lead is passed to the Lead of GRSI Project Team 3 (Network Development) to carry on the meeting.

IV. Reports of Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative Project Teams

17. The Lead of GRSI Project Team 1 (Training and Best Practice) gave an overview of the group's recent activities, including the creation of a survey intended to address training gaps and existing tools and resources within national standards bodies. The speaker presented the rationale for the survey and informed participants that the survey would be disseminated in December 2021. The Working Party will give respondents until late January 2022 to complete the survey. The speaker noted that the survey can be taken anonymously, and all information will be treated as strictly confidential. The survey findings will inform subsequent training topics and delivery methods.

18. The Lead of GRSI Project Team 2 (Gender Responsive Standards Methodology) presented the Guidance Report on addressing gender inequality in standardization policy and standards development processes. Developed by a team of standards and gender experts, the report has been circulated internally for comment and will feature a glossary of related terms. It is anticipated that the report will be made available to the Initiative in 2022 and exist as a living document.

19. The Lead of GRSI Project Team 3 (Network Development) outlined the various events at which the speaker had presented gender-responsive standards and the work of the Initiative. This included: (i) CEN CENELEC webinar, "Inclusive European standardization: the case of gender" (10th March 2021); Organisation for European Co-Operation and Development (OECD) "Trade and gender event" (9th June 2021); The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), "Women in science and gender equity" (23rd August, 2021); International Conference on Sustainable Development (ICSD), parallel session 2A (20th September 2021) & parallel session 10A (21st September 2021); ARSO "Gender lens in standardization" (27th October 2021).

V. Updates from standards bodies

20. The European Affairs Director of ASTM International provided an overview of the international standards organisation's work with respect to gender. The speaker underscored ASTM's commitment to the *Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development*, noting that the organisation was amongst the very first signatories in May 2019. Further, it was noted that partnership and knowledge sharing is a cornerstone of ASTM International's work, and the organisation is committed to working towards gender balance.

21. The Gender Focal Point of the Spanish Association for Standardization (UNE) provided an update on the steps taken by the organisation to implement a gender approach. The speaker noted how this included the creation of UNE-IWA 34 (the country's first standard on gender) and the establishment of a National Committee on Gender, to ensure a permanent dialogue. Further, the speaker highlighted the series

of gender webinars and the internal plan to drive in-house changes for gender equality. The speaker concluded the presentation by encouraging interested participants to attend their virtual gender webinar, “A step forward towards gender-responsive standards” (9th December 2021).

22. The Senior Standards Project Manager of Fairtrade International provided an update on how the work of the organisation supports gender equality. Detailing the various instruments of the Fairtrade system, the speaker discussed Fairtrade standards, gender policy and gender representation in committees. Taking their standard for Tea (Hired Labour), the speaker noted the importance of the women’s committee in the implementation of the standards and the critical nature of women’s engagement in the implementation and review of gender policy.

VI. Open floor

23. At the request of the GRSI Lead, the Acting Secretary of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) explained the administrative aspects of a potential formalisation of the GRSI. The speaker noted the important work and dynamic composition, which could merit the Initiative becoming an official subgroup of WP.6, as a team of specialists or advisory group. He noted that the GRSI would likely not fit under the Ad-Hoc Team of Specialists on Standardization and Regulatory Techniques (START) and could therefore be proposed as an independent new team of specialists under WP.6.

24. The speaker detailed the process of formalisation, which included a terms of reference being presented to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standardization (parent body of WP.6). If accepted by the member States of the Steering Committee, it would then move to the Executive Committee of UNECE which would validate the request to form the Team of Specialists. Formalisation would require the GRSI to report to the parent body, WP.6, which means the annual session of the GRSI would have to be done at least four months in advance of the WP.6 annual session so that a report can be finalised and presented. Formalisation would confirm the Chairpersonship, alter the timing of the annual meeting of the GRSI and serve to establish the Initiative as a clear sub-group of the Working Party. This would enable the work to be better recognised within the Working Party and UN system beyond the current extra-budgetary project. The participants confirmed their request to move towards formalisation into a Team of Specialists.

25. The representative of the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) presented a brief overview of the organisation and its future plans for gender equality. The speaker highlighted the organisation’s new roadmap, the Strategic Plan 2021-2030, and the importance placed on the greater engagement of women in standards projects. Key performance indicator 11 of SMIIC’s Strategic Plan asks the organisation to improve the standards process by increasing the percentage of women experts involved in standards projects. The Plan seeks to increase women’s involvement – from 31 percent (current level) to 41 percent – across the coming ten-year period. The speaker noted that the increased involvement of women in the technical work will ensure the organisation benefits from the capabilities and experience of women. To achieve this increase, SMIIC will encourage members to assign greater numbers of women to technical work and undertake projects which support women’s empowerment.

26. The Acting Secretary of Working Party 6 delivered a brief statement on behalf of Chair of the Initiative on Education and Standardization (START-Ed), which convened on 23rd November. It was noted that the *Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development* was reported to the EASC in May 2021. Further, the START-Ed group has been working on a set of twelve modules on education on standardization and are eager to add a module on gender-responsive

standards and inclusive standards development processes. They welcome collaboration from experts within the GRSI.

27. The Meeting Coordinator identified a question from the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB) to the representative of ASTM International related to capacity building in the field of 3D printing. The representative of ASTM International informed participants that the question had been forwarded to colleagues in the respective department for further information. The speaker noted the memorandum of understanding agreement with MSB, and this might constitute a way to directly communicate and offer services in this space.

28. The Acting Secretary of Working Party 6 extended an open invitation to attendees to participate in the annual session of the Working Party, which runs from Wednesday 24th (15:00) to Friday 26th November (17:00). He noted that the annual session will feature presentations from the GRSI and a panel event on circular economy, including an intervention from the Lead of the GRSI on the importance of gender-responsive standards for circularity.

29. The meeting was concluded. Next meeting of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative will be convened in February 2022.