

Twenty-sixth meeting of the Working Group of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention
Thematic Session on Access to Information

Key Points of the Intervention on UNECE The Sustainability Pledge

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Improving traceability and transparency has become a priority for the garment and footwear industry. Consumers, governments, and civil society demand responsible business conduct and call upon the industry to identify and address impacts and risks for human rights, the environment, and human health. UNECE and The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), jointly with key industry stakeholders have looked into such challenges, and launched the [global framework initiative](#) “[The Sustainability Pledge](#)”, implemented with the International Trade Centre (ITC), and support of the European Union, to enhance transparency and traceability for sustainable value chains in the garment and footwear industry. Over the period 2019-2023 the project set-up a multi-stakeholder policy platform, and developed the [Policy Recommendation N°46](#), including implementation guidelines, traceability and information exchange standards, and capacity-building to support all stakeholders in the uptake of traceability and transparency approaches. In order to leave no one behind, UNECE provides capacity-building efforts, as well as technological and knowledge transfer. As part of the work, UNECE has launched "[The Sustainability Pledge Call to Action](#)" inviting governments, manufacturers and industry stakeholders to apply the tools and to take a positive step towards improving the environmental and ethical credentials of the sector. As of now, 76 pledges have been submitted, from 287 partners and more than 60 actors, of which 41 are SMEs.

In the context of its global initiative, UNECE has been exploring the role that blockchain technology and DNA markers can play for end-to-end traceability from field to shelf. From January 2020 to June 2022, UNECE implemented blockchain pilots in cotton and leather value chains to support companies in their efforts to collect trustworthy product information and comply with relevant norms and standards for responsible consumption and production. The pilots cover the full spectrum of value chain tiers engaging with a variety of actors, from the cotton field (farmers, cooperatives, traders), through pre-manufacturing and manufacturing (spinners, weavers, dyers, finishers, manufacturers), to brands and retailers selling products. The products traced (jeans, shirts, socks, bags, shoes etc.) represent some of the world’s most sold items in terms of volume. Until now, more than 60 partners cover the full spectrum from value chains, across 18 countries worldwide. The Proof-of-Concept report will be published in the coming months of 2022 and will provide key findings from these use cases. New pilots on other fibres such as wool and cashmere, as well as other industries, including agri-foods and minerals are planned for future operations.

In fact, advanced technologies, like blockchain, allow to obtain truthful information that increase companies’ abilities to manage value chains more effectively, identify, mitigate and address labor and human rights violations and sustainability impacts. Also, verified information about the product’s origin, fibre content, durability, production processes and contained chemicals ensures correct recyclability, reusability and waste production as well as support consumers to make better informed choices and to trust sustainability claims.