Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

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

Thirty-second session
Geneva, 7–9 November 2022
Item 8 (c) of the provisional agenda
Programme of work for 2023

Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2023

Submitted by the Bureau

Summary

This document presents the detailed *Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies* based on the *Trade subprogramme's programme of work for 2023* (ECE/CTCS/2022/8) that was endorsed during the seventh session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards on 27 and 28 June 2022 and subsequent silence procedure.

This document is presented to the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) for decision.

Proposed decision

"The Working Party adopts the *Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2023*."

Please recycle ♻

I.   Introduction

1.   The programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) aims to create value to sustainable international trade through best practices identified with member States and industry. As per its terms of reference (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/11 pending final approval), the Working Party: "aims to promote regulatory cooperation, standardization policies and activities which contribute towards reducing technical barriers to trade, promoting sustainable development in its all dimensions including, for example, gender equality, climate and environmental protection, circular economy and the adaptation to new technologies". This work is vested in the Regulatory Cooperation Unit of the Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division.

2.   The objective, the strategy, the planned results and the deliverables in the programme of work correspond to those contained in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) *Proposed programme budget for 2023* (A/77/6 (Sect. 20)) (see deliverables in Annex I). The work of the subprogramme is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

II.   Relation to overall objectives within the United Nations

3.   The Working Party is in a unique position to support multiple objectives of the United Nations and ECE. It works on quality infrastructure which, among other things, ensures that goods put on the market are compliant with applicable regulations. This is done, for example, through the use of standards. Through its gender-responsive standards initiative, WP.6 has demonstrated that if gender mainstreaming aspects are taken into account at the level of standards development, the resulting goods, processes and services will be gender-responsive. A similar approach can be taken on other cross-cutting topics and help contribute to ensuring that products on the market have taken into account key objectives such as sustainability, circularity, digitalization, or disaster risk reduction.

A.   Sustainable Development Goals

4.   As demonstrated through its extrabudgetary projects (see ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/10), the Working Party has been deeply engaged in mapping standards to SDGs and providing guidance on how standards can help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). WP.6 contributes, among others to improving gender equality (SDG 5), fostering decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), providing quality infrastructure (SDG 9), supporting circular economy approaches (SDG 12), and working through partnerships (SDG 17). The projects of WP.6 plan to continue to support SDGs throughout 2023.

B.   Circular economy

5.   At the sixty-ninth session of ECE held on 20 and 21 April 2021, member States committed to step up efforts to promote circular economy approaches and sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes as appropriate (E/2021/37-E/ECE/1494). The Working Party chose this as the theme of its thirty-first session where each work area discussed how it can contribute to circularity. Integrating the principle of circularity into the standards of product designs will help to ensure sustainable end-of-lifecycle management of goods. Such integration is suggested in the revision of *Recommendation T on Standards and Regulations for Sustainable Development* (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/6). The projects of WP.6 plan to continue exploring ways to support circularity throughout 2023.

C. Digital and green transformations

6. Following the decision of the 119 EXCOM meeting on December 2021, the seventieth Commission session theme will be the digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region. The Working Party has already integrated aspects of digitalization into its general work, notably concerning risk management and product compliance. The theme of artificial intelligence has been raised several times both from a control perspective of products integrating such technologies and from a risk management perspective of common regulatory objectives that might need to be taken into consideration. Work on this theme is planned to continue in 2023.

7. WP.6 seeks to promote further horizontal guidance across its subgroups with respect to regulatory challenges related to digitalization. This includes topics like cybersecurity, privacy, artificial intelligence and data-based products.

D. Disaster risk reduction

8. Responding to the dramatic increase in extreme weather events and mega-disasters is one of the greatest challenges of our present age. Climate change, rapid urbanization and population growth in hazard-prone cities and coastal areas make action all the more urgent. This is outlined in the *United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience* (see background document presented to the 2018 annual session of WP.6, agenda item 6). WP.6 and its secretariat shall continue to work on presenting and orienting its pertinent work which can help to support the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

III. Highlights of expected achievements during 2023

A. Regulatory cooperation

9. Products placed on markets need to comply with the regulatory requirements in domestic and export markets. Consistent with the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) administered multilateral trading system, technical regulations should be developed with the aim of addressing health, safety and environmental concerns without posing unnecessary barriers to trade. Businesses need to study, understand and comply with such regulatory requirements by implementing standards referenced in national technical regulations.

10. In the area of regulatory cooperation, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a) Continue to expand the "Standards for the SDGs" portal with further mappings, case studies and commentaries as provided by partners

(b) Review existing recommendations and guidance material (beyond those specifically listed elsewhere in this document) to evaluate if revisions or modifications are necessary with a view to ensuring regulatory harmonization

(c) Review for possible updates the *Recommendation K on Metrological Assurance of Conformity Assessment and Testing*

(d) Develop guidance related to the challenges for market surveillance in relation to data-based products utilizing innovations.

B. Market surveillance

11. Market surveillance enables Governments to ensure that products comply with mandatory regulatory requirements. The Advisory Group on Market Surveillance (MARS) promotes best practice guidelines that could serve as a reference framework for Governments.

12. In the area of market surveillance, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a) Review for possible updates the *Recommendation M on Use of Market Surveillance Infrastructure as a Complementary Means to Protect Consumers and Users against Counterfeit Goods* and plan for guidelines on implementation of this recommendation. A webinar on counterfeit products could also be planned in support of this

(b) Review for possible updates linked to digitalization and sustainability the *Recommendation N on Good Market Surveillance Policies and Practices*

(c) Continue exchanges of experience in the area of market surveillance in order to identify and bring forward best practices in this field while further developing the network of global and regional market surveillance entities

(d) Enhance cooperation with customs agencies, with an objective to improve controls at the border and application of market access regulations

(e) Develop further the *Market Surveillance Model Initiative Guide to the Use of the General Market Surveillance Procedures* covering all phases of market surveillance from planning of inspections to dangerous product recall

(f) Develop a guide to clarify certain terms in the *Market Surveillance Glossary*

C. Risk management

13. Risk management aims to safeguard against hazards that stem from the quality of products and services – or lack thereof – that have the potential to cause harm or damage the health and safety of consumers and the environment. Standards and technical regulations are – among other things – risk mitigation tools and they should be proportionate to risks they were set out to address. Development and enforcement of regulations require application of the state-of-the-art risk management tools. Taken collectively, regulations make products safe, make organizations' processes stable and ensure consumers are better protected from hazards. The Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems (GRM) is the focal point within WP.6 for this work.

14. In the area of risk management, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a) Develop training materials and guidance documents on the implementation of the suite of risk management recommendations

(b) Conduct a survey on the application of crisis management principles described in *Recommendation P on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems* during the COVID-19 crisis

(c) Develop best practice on applying integrated risk management within the Single Window (in cooperation with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business – UN/CEFACT)

(d) Enhance cooperation through the secretariat of WP.6 with customs agencies, national trade facilitation bodies, and international organizations working in the field, with an objective to improve risk management procedures and harmonization and to contribute to the risk management activities of other international organizations

(e) Establish and strengthen through the secretariat of WP.6 liaison with other risk management organizations

D. Gender-responsive standardization

15. The lack of gender-responsive standards and awareness of their importance has resulted in unnecessary health and safety risks for women and girls and led to standards having unequal impacts in other areas. Many standard-setting bodies operate without a policy for mainstreaming gender in their activities and in the management of their organizations. In 2016, WP.6 launched the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI). This is an

important contribution to SDG 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". This has resulted in the publication in 2018 of the *Recommendation U on Gender-Responsive Standards* and the *Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development* which has to date nearly eighty signatories.

16.   In the area of gender-responsive standardization, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)   Enhance the implementation of the *Recommendation U* and encourage national standards bodies and relevant standards developers to sign the *Declaration*

(b)   Develop a model best practice for a gender action plan for a standards development body

(c)   Develop materials (presentation slide deck, resources, media content) that can be used to promote the work of GRSI

(d)   Develop training on gender-responsive standards and ensure its translation into other languages such as French, Russian and/or other official United Nations languages

(e)   Act as a focal point for information-sharing, collaboration and developing relevant solutions such as national gender action plans, essentially through two action areas of GRSI:

(i)   Knowledge-sharing and best practices

(ii)   Gender-responsive standards methodology

E.   Education

17.   Building awareness on standards and the standardization processes is important not only for those within specific industries using standards, but for all those who may potentially be impacted by standards, in other words, anyone who would be involved in commercial trading activities. The START-Ed initiative on Education on Standardization has been established as a platform for cooperation and exchange of experiences on teaching standards and on methodological and practical support to teachers.

18.   In the area of education, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)   Explore labour market requirements regarding new skills and competences of graduates in relation to standardization

(b)   Enhance cooperation with WP.6 subgroups to develop teaching material which could be used under the START-Ed initiative and under the subgroups

(c)   Further develop e-learning courses which reflect the model curricula proposed by START-Ed

(d)   Promote the implementation of the new module on environmental issues (pending the approval of this module by the annual session within the START report)

(e)   Start creating the network of educational focal points (pending the approval of the terms of reference of this network by the annual session within the START report)

IV.   External factors

19.   The Regulatory Cooperation Unit is expected to implement these activities (outlined in Annex II) on the assumption that: (a) there is political will and cooperation among Governments, standards bodies and other key quality infrastructure institutions; (b) there is demand for ECE standards and recommendations; (c) member States provide the necessary information and support; (d) there is active participation by experts in ECE technical meetings; and (e) donor support for the work of the subprogramme is adequate.

V. Additional resources being sought

20. If additional resources can be secured, the Working Party will

(a) conduct a follow-up project to the Standards for SDG / Gender-responsive standards project

(b) respond to requests for capacity-building by member States

(c) support the implementation of ECE WP.6 recommendations by member States, as appropriate

Annex I

Deliverables to be implemented in 2023

1. The mandates of WP.6 and its subgroups provide the legislative framework for its deliverables. The table below lists all deliverables, by category and subcategory, for the year 2023 that are expected to contribute to the attainment of the objective of WP.6 stated above. This table is an excerpt from the *Proposed programme budget for 2023* (A/77/6 (Sect. 20)). Note that the number of meetings in section A was increased from 5 half-day sessions – which covers only the annual session needs – to thirteen half-day sessions which will cover all of the subgroup meetings as well.

2. The deliverables of the subprogramme fall into the following main categories: (a) facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert groups; (b) generation and transfer of knowledge, including technical cooperation projects, training events, seminars, workshops, and publications; (c) other substantive deliverables; and (d) communication deliverables.

Deliverables	*2023*
	planned
Quantified deliverables	
A. **Facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies**	
Parliamentary documentation (number of documents)	
2. Documentation for the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies	14
Substantive services for meetings (number of three-hour meetings)	
6. Meetings of Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies	13
B. **Generation and transfer of knowledge**	
Seminars, workshops and training events (number of days)	
15. Workshops for policymakers and experts in low- and middle-income countries in the ECE region on trade procedures, supply chain management, conformity assessment and market surveillance, and women's entrepreneurship	2
Publications (number of publications)	
22. Gender-responsive standards	3
Technical materials (number of materials)	
25. Material on trade standards	2
C. **Substantive deliverables**	
Consultation, advice and advocacy: Advisory services to government officials and other stakeholders in ECE member States on trade facilitation and electronic business, agricultural quality standards, regulatory cooperation and standardization and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade	
Fact-finding, monitoring missions: Fact-finding missions in ECE member States on trade facilitation and electronic business, agricultural quality standards, regulatory cooperation and standardization and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade	
D. **Communication deliverables**	
Outreach programmes, special events and information materials: Booklets, fact sheets, information brochures	
External and media relations: Annual set of press releases for the Unit	
Digital platforms and multimedia content: Update and maintenance of the website and databases of the subprogramme as well as of the portal on "Standards for the SDGs"	

Annex II

List of planned activities and outputs of the Working Party 6 in 2023

1.   Within this broad mandate, the secretariat proposes to undertake the following activities

> (a)   To prepare and service the thirty-third annual session of WP.6 comprised of:
>
> • fourteen documents
>
> • five half-day meetings
>
> • reporting

> (b)   To prepare and service the annual meeting of the Advisory Group on Market Surveillance (MARS) and:
>
> • organize two webinars
>
> • update the online database on market surveillance
>
> • update the information on global and regional market surveillance networks
>
> • finalize the "Market Surveillance Model Initiative"
>
> • prepare the reporting to the WP.6 annual session

> (c)   To prepare and service the annual meeting of the Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems (GRM) and:
>
> • organize six webinars
>
> • collaborate through the secretariat with ISO/TC 262 and ISO/TC 292 in developing work on disruption-related and supply chain risks
>
> • identify and involve regulators in the group's work: in particular chief risk management officers
>
> • prepare the reporting to the WP.6 annual session

> (d)   To prepare and service the annual meeting of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (pending final approval of this group by the Executive Committee of ECE) and:
>
> • organize six webinars
>
> • seek further signatories to the Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development
>
> • assist with the preparation of guidance material in this area
>
> • establish a repository of case studies on gender action plans
>
> • prepare the reporting to the WP.6 annual session

> (e)   To prepare and service the annual meeting of the Ad Hoc Team of Specialists on Standardization and Regulatory Techniques (START) and its initiatives as well as the reporting to the WP.6 annual session

> (f)   To support the activities on education on standards-related issues (START-Ed):
>
> • organize two webinars
>
> • establish the network of focal points and encouraging cooperation and input from this network into the work of START-Ed
>
> • continue the cooperation through the secretariat with the League of European Research Universities and the University of Geneva

- prepare the reporting to the WP.6 annual session

(g) To promote and advocate for the use of standards in the context of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

- contribute to ECE and United Nations-wide initiatives on SDG implementation and support the participation of standards organizations
- contribute to the work of the ECE nexuses

(h) To cooperate with WTO: WP.6 secretariat will participate in the meetings of the WTO Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement as well as the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender in 2022 and 2023 and provide updates on its activities in these meetings

———————