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
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Item 7 of the provisional agenda
Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative

Report on activities of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative 2021–2022

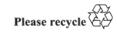### Submitted by the initiative Coordinator

Summary

In 2016, the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) created the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative with the aim of improving gender balance in standards development and ensuring that the content and impact of standards, when implemented, are gender-responsive. This document reports on the progress in the work of this initiative for the period 2021–2022.

Mandate

At its thirty-first session, the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) mandated the secretariat and the Coordinator to continue to report on an annual basis on these activities.

Proposed decision

"The Working Party adopts the *Report on activities of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative*. It encourages member States to engage in dialogue with standards bodies in their jurisdiction to become signatories of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) *Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development*. It further encourages member States to consider financing for follow-up work particularly capacity-building for gender action plans. It also requests the secretariat to continue its awareness-raising efforts and to report on activities at the next session."

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. Taking concerted action on gender equality and inclusion within the standards development process is an important and necessary means of ensuring the adequacy of standards to address sustainable development challenges. Through the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI), ECE has supported standards bodies and organizations to introduce measures which recognize the value of diverse voices and promote the participation of women.

2. The disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls has threatened to undermine the advances in gender equality made over recent years. A recent study by the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards (ECE/CTCS/2022/4)[1] further confirmed that female-owned micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) were particularly vulnerable to trade disruption, caused by the COVID-19 shock.

3. As reported by several organizations during the annual meeting of GRSI (8 June 2022), standards have an immense potential to shape solutions to structural inequalities. These can provide the information and tools necessary to achieve sustainable outcomes, drive inclusive practices and accelerate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. As such, the work of GRSI has become increasingly urgent, as a means of encouraging a gender lens in standards and advancing women's full and effective participation in standards development.

4. Our focus during this period has been on the activities of the project teams within GRSI (see below for more information), which are developing innovative tools and resources to support standards development organizations (SDOs) to implement gender action plans and ensure that standards and standards development practices increasingly meet the needs of women and girls.

II. Project teams

A. Project Team 1 on knowledge-sharing and training

5. The experts of Project Team 1 (PT1) developed a survey, which identified and collected tools and resources, including training materials, from SDOs. The aim of the survey was to gather information regarding materials, research studies, gender action plans and any unmet needs to support the development of a gender-responsive standards resources hub for SDOs. The survey covered four sections: Gender action plan (GAP); Training; Research; Additional information and comments.

6. The survey was completed in November 2021 and distributed to the GRSI mailing list in December 2021. The survey was completed by 22 respondents and information was consolidated by the secretariat. Survey information was made available to PT1 experts to examine and prepare recommendations.

7. The survey results indicate that under half of respondents have or are completing gender action plans, with most respondents having no or informal targets/indicators. Despite the systematic implementation of gender focal points – though many are not top-managerial level – the survey results confirm a lack of awareness and knowledge of gender-responsiveness. As a result, there is a focus on achieving responsiveness through balancing male and female participation, with little attention to the measurement of the responsiveness of completed standards.

8. PT1 concluded that there is a fundamental lack of training, both in overall staff training and for committee members, and inconsistent internal processes in standards setting pertaining to gender. Despite a lack of gender-responsiveness research being undertaken by organizations, the survey indicated that they are interested: (i) in sharing their information

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[1] Findings and recommendations emerging from the COVID-19 impact assessments targeting female-owned MSMEs in selected countries (ECE/CTCS/2022/4), available at:
https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/ECE_CTCS_2022_04_E.pdf.

and gender action plans; (ii) in receiving more gender-responsive standards information, and (iii) in taking gender training in different formats and multiple languages.

9.   The experts of PT1 recommended that further information and extensive support are necessary for organizations to achieve gender-responsiveness. This support could be delivered in the form of workshops, training materials and checklists, which can be applied during the standard development process and/or as reviewing existing standards.

B.   Project Team 2 on a methodology for assessing and developing gender-responsive standards

10.   The experts of Project Team 2 (PT2) drafted the Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/9), which present practical steps to address gender inequality in standardization policy and standards development processes. It considers aspects of inclusive recruitment, balanced representation, and unconscious bias. The intended audience for the guidelines is technical committee members and standards developers.

11.   PT2 intended for the publication to be concise and practical. It addresses:

• the fundamental need for gender-responsive standards,

• the recruitment and retention of women on technical committees and as participants in standards development,

• the delivery of balanced and inclusive meetings, and

• the processes to ensure standards are gender-responsive, regardless of who is on the expert committee.

12.   The Guidelines publication draft was preliminarily published in January 2022 for WP.6 internal review before a broader consultation was undertaken. The secretariat developed a comment submission template and consolidated the expert comments as they were received.

13.   The consultation period concluded on 31 May 2022, with comments received from representatives of the British Standards Institution (BSI); the Bureau de Normalisation du Québec (BNQ); the Comité Européen de Normalisation (CEN/CENELEC); the European Commission; Federation University Australia; and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). These comments were consolidated at a meeting of PT2 (2 June 2022). The final version of the Guidelines was endorsed during this meeting and proposed to be presented to the WP.6 annual session in November 2022 for final approval.

C.   Project Team 3 on network development

14.   The experts of this Project Team have participated and will participate in a number of events to disseminate the work of GRSI:

• The Asociación Española de Normalización (UNE) and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) convened a webinar "A step forward towards gender-responsive standards" (9 December 2021). The lead of GRSI shared experiences on gender-responsive standards, the ECE Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development and how to integrate a gender lens in standards development more effectively.

• The African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) convened a webinar "Mainstreaming Gender in Standardization" (27 October 2021) and invited the lead of PT3 to present on gender-responsive standards.

III.   Meetings in 2022

15.   As recommended in the evaluation of WP.6 activities (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2019/4), meeting times of GRSI were varied to enable the participation of global experts.

16. The 15 February 2022 (20:00 pm, CET) meeting of GRSI focused on the "Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards" (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/9). Participants were encouraged to assist with translation, where possible, and submit comments before the end of the commenting period on 31 May 2022. At this meeting, the lead of PT1 gave a brief introduction to the survey and invited participants to respond.

17. The 13 April 2022 (21:00 pm, CEST) meeting of GRSI focused on the PT1 survey. Experts of the project team presented the survey, initial findings, and conclusions. From the survey findings, they concluded that there is a good commitment to the principle of gender-responsiveness. However, there is a lack of knowledge on how to achieve gender-responsiveness, particularly when there is an expectation of broader inclusiveness.

18. The annual meeting of the GRSI was held on 8 June 2022, from 10:00 am – 17:00 pm (CEST). The morning session highlighted the achievements of the initiative, in the period 2021–2022, and discussed the programme of work for the coming year. Participants were given time to present new areas of work, examine best practices and propose activities to GRSI regarding future work.

19. The afternoon segment of the annual meeting featured a panel discussion on the topic of "Gender, digitalization, the environment: ensuring a sustainable future for all". The discussion featured three panels: "Setting the scene: the intersection of standards with gender, digitalization, and the environment"; "Closing the digital divide: how standards can strengthen digital literacy and improve access to digital technologies"; "Gender bias in advanced technologies: the important role of standards in reshaping the digital future for all". The event was online only and had 125 registered participants. The presentations and a report from this meeting are available online.[2]

20. GRSI was represented by the lead of PT2 at the roundtable session of the ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (7 April 2022). Led by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the session ("Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of COVID-19 pandemic") discussed how Governments can promote gender equality and women's empowerment as part of the COVID-19 recovery process, considering the gendered impacts of the pandemic. This event further integrated gender-responsive standards into the discussion on gender equality and highlighted the importance of gender-responsive standards as a critical tool in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 5. The recording of this event is available online.[3]

IV. Signatories of the Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development

21. At the time of writing, the number of SDOs that are signatories to the ECE *Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development* stands at seventy-seven. For a full list of signatories please see Annex.

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[2] https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366794.
[3] https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/session-5-sdg-5-accelerators-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-context-covid-19.

Annex

ECE Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development signatories

1.   The following SDOs of United Nations Member States have signed the Declaration as of August 2022:

Albania – General Directorate of Standardization (DPS)

Argentina – Instituto Argentino de Normalización y Certificación (IRAM)

Austria – Austrian Standards International (ASI)

Benin – Agence National de Normalisation, de Métrologie et du Contrôle Qualité (ANM)

Bolivia (Plurinational State of) – Instituto Boliviano de Normalización y Calidad (IBNORCA)

Bosnia and Herzegovina – Institute for Standardization of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ISBIH)

Botswana – Botswana Bureau of Standards (BOBS)

Brazil – Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas (ABNT)

Canada – Standards Council of Canada (SCC)

Colombia – Instituto Colombiano de Normas Técnicas y Certificación

Costa Rica – National Standards Body of Costa Rica (INTECO)

Cyprus – Cyprus Organization for Standardization (CYS)

Democratic Republic of the Congo – Office Congolais de Contrôle (OCC)

Denmark – Danish Standards (DS)

Dominican Republic – Instituto Dominicano para la Calidad (INDOCAL)

Ecuador – Servicio Ecuatoriano de Normalización (INEN)

France – Association Française de Normalisation (AFNOR)

Gambia – The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB)

Georgia – Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology (GeoSTM)

Germany – Deutsches Institut für Normung (DIN)

Germany – German Commission for Electrotechnical, Electronic, and Information Technologies of DIN and VDE (DKE)

Honduras – Organismo Hondureño de Normalización (OHN)

Iceland – Icelandic Standards (IST)

India – Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

Ireland – National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI)

Israel – Standards Institute of Israel (SII)

Italy – Comitato Elettrotecnico Italiano (CEI)

Italy – Ente Italiano di Normazione (UNI)

Latvia – Latvian Standard (LVS)

Lithuania – Lithuanian Standards Board (LST)

Luxembourg – Institut luxembourgeois de la normalisation, de l'accréditation, de la sécurité et qualité des produits et services (ILNAS)Madagascar – Bureau des Normes de Madagascar (BNM)

Mali – Agence Malienne de Normalisation et de Promotion de la Qualité (AMANORM)

Malta – Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA)

Mauritius – Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB)

Mexico – Dirección General de Normas (DGN)

Morocco – Institut Marocain de Normalisation (IMANOR)

Mozambique – Instituto Nacional de Normalização e Qualidade (INNOQ)

Netherlands – Royal Netherlands Standardization Institute (NEN)

New Zealand – New Zealand IEC National Committee

New Zealand – New Zealand Standards Organization (NZSO)

Norway – Standards Norway (SN)

Papua New Guinea – National Institute of Standards and Industrial Technology (NISIT)

Peru – Instituto Nacional de Calidad (INACAL)

Portugal – Instituto Português da Qualidade (IPQ)

Republic of Moldova – Institute for Standardization of Moldova (ISM)

Rwanda – Rwandan Standards Board (RSB)

Saint Kitts and Nevis – Saint Kitts and Nevis Bureau of Standards

Saint Lucia – Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards (SLBS)

Senegal – Association Sénégalaise de Normalisation (ASN)

South Africa – South African Bureau of Standards (SABS)

Spain – Asociación Española de Normalización (UNE)

Sweden – Swedish Institute for Standards (SIS)

Switzerland – Swiss Association for Standardization (SNV)

Thailand – Thai Industrial Standards Institute (TISI)

Togo – Agence Togolaise de Normalisation (ATN)

Trinidad and Tobago – Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS)

Türkiye – Türk Standardlari Enstitüsü (TSE)

United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – British Standards Institution (BSI)

United States of America – American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME)

Uruguay – Instituto Uruguayo de Normas Técnicas (UNIT)

2.   The following international SDOs have signed the Declaration as of August 2022:

African Organization for Standardization (ARSO)

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ASTM International

Comisión Panamericana de Normas Técnicas (COPANT)

European Committee for Standardization (CEN) and European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC)

Fairtrade International

Gold Standard

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)

International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

Rainforest Alliance

Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC)

Round Table on Responsible Soy Association (RTRS)

Standards and Metrology Institute for the Islamic Countries (SMIIC)

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Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)

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