



Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

**Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation
and Standardization Policies (WP.6)****Thirty-third session**

Geneva, 23–24 November 2023

Item 7 of the provisional agenda

Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards**Report on activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender-
Responsive Standards 2022–2023****Submitted by the GRS Chair***Summary*

The Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (GRS) was created under the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) in September 2022 as a continuation of the work of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) started in 2016. This document reports on the progress in the work of the GRS and GRSI for the period 2022–2023.

Mandate

At its thirty-second session, the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) mandated the secretariat and the gender-responsive standards team to continue to report on an annual basis on its activities.

Proposed decision

“The Working Party adopts the *Report on activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards*. 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* and to also consider submitting examples of any standards-related gender action plans using the GRS template for this. It further encourages member States to consider financing for follow-up work, particularly capacity-building for gender action plans. It also requests the Team of Specialists secretariat to continue its awareness-raising efforts and to report on activities at the next session.”



I. Introduction

1. In 2016, the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) launched the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) with an aim to help support the implementation of the sustainable development goal “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (SDG 5) through gender-responsive standards. This resulted in the *Recommendation U on Gender-Responsive Standards* which includes a *Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development* and suggested elements for standards-related gender action plans.

2. On 30 September 2022, the ECE Executive Committee approved the creation of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (GRS) as a continuation of this work (ECE/EX/2022/L.13, 5d). The GRS had its first working meeting on 14 December 2022 where experts of the group nominated Ms. Michelle Parkouda of Canada as Chair, Ms. Stephanie Eynon of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as Vice-Chair and Ms. Lucy He of New Zealand as Vice-Chair.

II. Report on progress of activities 2022-2023

3. GRS has made good progress on the activities which were defined in the WP.6 Programme of Work (PoW) for 2023 (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/12).

- In support of paragraph 16(a), GRS continually encourages national standards bodies and relevant standards developers to sign the *Declaration* (see below in the implementation section the update on new signatories).
- In support of paragraph 16(b), GRS developed a template questionnaire to ask signatories of the *Declaration* to provide details on the implementation of their gender action plans. The template was completed, and submissions have been received from Australia, Austria, Ecuador, New Zealand and Rwanda as well as from the European Committees for Standardization/European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CEN/CENELEC) (see below in the return on experience section the update from some of these stakeholders). GRS is encouraging others to respond and plans to develop a model best practice for gender action plan for standards development bodies based on the responses.
- In support of paragraph 16(c), GRS has completed two publications: *Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards* (ECE/TRADE/472) and *Why Gender-Responsive Standards are Better for Everyone* (ECE/TRADE/474)
- In support of paragraph 16(d), the LearnQI e-learning module on gender-responsive standards was launched; in the first six months of the platform, 122 individuals enrolled and 92 have completed the course. The translations of the course should be online shortly.
- In support of paragraph 16(e), GRS has held regular meetings to discuss best practices, knowledge sharing and methodology. These meetings were held on: 15 September 2022, 14 December 2022, 8 February 2023, 18 April 2023, and 24 May 2023. Meeting reports and agendas are available on the individual meeting pages.¹

¹ See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/370251>; <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/373467>; <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/374685>; <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/375758>.

III. Impact and implementation

A. Return on experiences / best practices

4. GRS regularly encourages the sharing of best practices and return on experiences. To this end, it organized a webinar on “Achievements and challenges in implementing gender action plans” on 24 May 2023 as part of its first annual meeting.² Some of the highlights on return on experiences and best practices follow.

5. CEN/CENELEC was among the first signatories of the *Declaration* and implemented a first gender action plan 2020 to 2022 which aimed to promote awareness, exchange on best practices, promote collaboration and establish an “Informal Coordination Group on Gender Diversity and Inclusion”. This first plan helped to create a collective understanding and a positive impact. Building upon this, a second gender action plan was approved in November 2022 for a period of 2023-2025. This plan is axed on awareness raising, supporting tools (and using tools that already exist such as those of ECE) and the review of policies and regulations. CEN/CENELEC underlined several key best practices including the involvement of key organizations (such as Women4Cyber or WomenInEnergy) and the establishment of a dedicated group internally to coordinate efforts which can help to spark collaboration and identifying new themes. The informal aspect of their group on gender allows it to be more agile and adapt to the needs; however, it was stressed that clear scope, goals and resources need to be outlined. The CEN/CENELEC approach is also horizontal, as part of a wider discussion and wider commitment on gender. In conclusion, it was underlined that no step is too small and that every step towards gender equality is positive.

6. The Austrian Standards International (ASI) has implemented a gender action plan since 2022 with several actions. The first is on data collection/monitoring and they have been able to capture all of the data on participation in the technical committees and find relevant women experts in committees lacking balanced representations. The second action on awareness raising was notably advanced through a campaign done jointly with Germany and Switzerland on National Women’s Day on 8 March, producing video statements that have helped to identify some new observations and recommendations on gender-responsive standards. A third action is on acquisition of new experts to participate in technical committees which will be launched shortly. ASI also participates actively in European and international groups for gender and gender-responsive standards. Their plan will also in the future work on strategic positioning of the issue of gender in standardization.

7. The Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) underlined the strengths that it had after signing GRS *Declaration* including the commitment from the leadership, the strong partnership with other governmental institutions responsible for gender accountability, and the overall engagement of Rwanda on gender such as the *National Gender Policy* of 2021 or the gender equality seal programme which allows private sector to declare their engagement on gender issues. RSB has done a gender assessment lens focus in order to identify gaps to enact their gender action plan. One of these is to increase the number of women in engineering and standards projects committees. RSB is currently reviewing its strategic plan with an objective of promoting gender accountability in the areas of standards, certification, testing and metrology.

8. The Comisión Panamericana de Normas Técnicas (COPANT) signed the GRS *Declaration* in March 2022 and there are 15 out of the 31 regional national standards bodies have signed this declaration. Despite a general macho attitude in many of the countries of the region, there are ten national standards related to gender adopted in the region, often working closely with regulators in their countries to help attain SDG 5 nationally. COPANT has been working on building capacity of its members and further raising awareness on this topic through its gender equity action plan.

² The event webpage contains all of the presentations and bios of the speakers. See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/375801>

9. The Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC) signed the *GRS Declaration* in 2020 and has adopted a gender action plan 2023 to 2025 with five strategic goals: data gathering, women-centred development, reviewing standards with a gender lens, raising awareness and monitoring/evaluating/reporting. SMIIC is planning a series of trainings tailored for women training and dedicated webinars for women leaders in standards development. It is also promoting webinars to share best practices among its 47 members.

10. ASTM International has been focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging of which gender and gender equality is a large part of its diversity efforts. It utilizes the methodology established in the ECE Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards and demonstrated how some of the standards on textile, protective gear, sportswear took this into consideration and how it is documented within the standards themselves. A few committees have created their own diversity task group which review the content of each standard to ensure they are all gender responsive. ASTM further works on networking events, committee programs and standards development tools in order to empower their technical committee members.

11. There are a number of challenges in implementation. For example, there is still a lack of understanding of the importance of the topic of gender-responsive standards; for a lot of people, this is perceived as a “nice to have” instead of recognising the issues of safety and inclusiveness. Further awareness raising will be necessary.

B. Implementations

12. During this reporting period, there are seven new signatories to the *Declaration*: DKE of Germany December 2022, INACAL of Peru December 2022, Agence des Normes et de la Qualité of Cameroon December 2022, Institute for Standardization of Montenegro January 2023, Institute for Standardization of Serbia February 2023, Standards Australia February 2023 and KazStandards of Kazakhstan May 2023. This brings the total number of signatories up to 82. The full list is available on the dedicated webpage.³

C. Relation with other organizations’ work

13. The GRS leadership and the secretariat have made presentations about this work in multiple fora, including the ISO-IEC JSAG meeting in Stockholm Sweden on 24 April 2023, the ITU-T gender-responsive standards webinar on 4 May 2023, the UNCTAD meeting “Webinar on best practices and experiences on consumer protection and gender”⁴ of 17 May 2023, the UNCTAD Empowerment programme for Western Africa webinars on 31 May and 6 June 2023. A Podcast “Decoding Gender” on the topic was also held on 16 September 2022.⁵

14. The work of GRS is cited by other organization such as the European Commission⁶ and national programmes. The ITU also issued an invitation sent by their Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau Seizo Onoe to their members, associate members and academia members to undertake the learnQI e-learning module on gender-responsive standards on 24 January 2023.⁷

IV. Pertinence of the topic today

15. Though the COVID pandemic may have made gender-responsive standards a lower priority for many economies, it also enabled advances in some standards bodies’ technical

³ See: <https://unece.org/trade/wp6/Gender-Resp%20-Stdards-declaration>

⁴ See: <https://unctad.org/meeting/webinar-best-practices-and-experiences-consumer-protection-and-gender>

⁵ See: <https://ulse.org/ul-standards-engagement/word-wise-women-science-and-engineering-podcast-series/decoding-gender>

⁶ See European Commission, C(2023) 1210 Annex, 27 February 2023, item 82:

<https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/53720/attachments/2/translations/en/renditions/native>

⁷ ITU reference: TSB Circular 71/FT

committees. Personal protective equipment was put under the spotlight because of COVID, leading to better gender-responsiveness of facial masks.

16. The World Trade Organization (WTO) presented at the 24 May 2023 event and reminded the context of gender-responsive trade policies to promote women's integration into the international trading system. WTO reported that women in many African countries are being encouraged in many countries to enter the workforce in export-oriented sectors such as construction, mining and forestry. Efforts were also made in Japan to open the social services sector to transform unpaid work of housekeeping or childcare into paid work and enable more women to enter the workforce. Further trade policies in other places target financing with special quotas for women entrepreneurs.

17. The WTO also published *The Evolution of Gender-Related Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements*⁸ (RTA) in 2021. Out of 305 agreements, only 83 included provisions on gender or women. Gender is not mentioned in the same place in these agreements and the language, scope and commitments vary. This demonstrates an awareness of the issue, but also reflects that there is not yet consensus on how to approach it.

V. Future directions

18. GRS suggest continuing in the same direction, with all of the activities in the current PoW 2023. It was suggested to develop a specific focus on promotional material and seeking to cater this to different types of audiences. It was also suggested to develop material which highlights the impact of gender-responsive standards in daily life, providing further examples that demonstrate the need for gender-responsive standards. GRS also plans to explore further areas where it could provide guidance.

⁸ See: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/reser_e/ersd202108_e.htm