



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 August 2023

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Executive Committee

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Twenty-ninth session

Geneva, 9 and 10 November 2023

Item 6 (c) (i) of the provisional agenda

Recommendations, standards, and deliverables supporting implementation:

Deliverables in support of implementation:

Reports and executive guides

Executive Guide on Digital Product Conformity Certificate Exchange*

Submitted by the Bureau

Summary

This executive guide briefly outlines the concepts of digital product conformity certificate exchange and their application in developing Environmental, Social and Governance regulation. The principles detailed in this executive guide may also provide inspiration for future extension of existing supply platforms, in the direction of decentralising inputs and expanding user access by enabling off-platform interrogation of data.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/16 is submitted to the twenty-ninth session of the UN/CEFACT Plenary for information.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



I. Introduction

1. Testing, inspection and certification processes provide the backbone of global product assurance. To fully realise the benefits of an effective and equitable digital trade system, global interoperability in exchange of product conformity data is highly desirable. The search for interoperable processes that respect existing governance structures and historical approaches, while also accommodating emerging technologies, represents a significant challenge.

The testing inspection and certification sector comprises one million employees across more than 160 countries.

(Europe Economics Value of the Testing, Inspection and Certification Sector)

2. Mutually recognised anchors of trust (authoritative sources of digital information) are key to reconciling divergent existing frameworks with demands for interoperability in digital trade. This executive guide leverages the concept of mutually recognised anchors of trust by exploring access to product conformity information at its source, with digital links to both the physical product, relevant documentation and the issuing body's credentials. The guide makes clear that new possibilities arise when the challenge is framed in terms of access to, rather than exchange of, conformity attestations.

II. Applications

3. The concepts detailed in the White Paper have been developed to be sector-agnostic. This is helpful for applications such as Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) regulation, where outcomes may apply irrespective of product category.

4. The principles detailed in the Executive Guide may also provide inspiration for future extension of existing supply platforms, in the direction of decentralising inputs and expanding user access by enabling off-platform interrogation of data.

5. For sectors where the systems for managing product conformity data exchange may be relatively undeveloped, the Executive Guide maps a general pathway for achieving trusted product conformity without the need for investment in elaborate centralised platforms. While noting that least developed countries may face other difficulties in achieving trusted product conformity, the concepts described in the Executive Guide may still be of interest as these can be applied to current (paper) systems, as well as emerging future digital states, using existing open standards and technology.

III. Benefits

6. Expanding the availability and integrity of product conformity data may help to reduce product fraud as well as offering a powerful way to ensure that consumer choice is based on real, rather than perceived, product attributes.

7. By decentralising the processes for achieving trusted product conformity, it may be possible to reduce the burden on government to build and manage centralised systems that are heavily customised and consequently reduce interoperability through the creation of 'data islands'.

8. The concepts detailed in the Executive Guide may carry potential to reduce technical barriers to trade by enhancing the transparency of the processes that underpin mutual

recognition of product conformity. The approach also supports the coexistence of both paper and paperless certificate exchange, as will be necessary to enable the gradual (varying by geography) digital transformation and digitalisation of global product conformity systems.

IV. More information

Link to SCRDM:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/uncefact/BRS/BRS_SCRDM_v1.0.0.2.pdf

Link to MMT-RDM: http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/brs/BRS_T_L-MMT.zip

Link to RDM White Paper:

http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/cf_plenary/2017_Plenary/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2017_11E__White_Paper_on_RDM_.pdf

Link to RDM Guideline:

<http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/GuidanceMaterials/ReferenceDataModelGuideline-v1.0.0.2.pdf>
