



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 September 2023

Original: English

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 of activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender- Responsive Standards 2022–2023

Submitted by the subgroup Chair*

Summary

The Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (ToS-GRS) was created under the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) in September 2022 to further enhance the work of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) started in 2016. This document reports on the progress in the work of the ToS-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 (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/2, paragraph 36, decision 9).

Proposed decision

“The Working Party adopts the *Report of activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards 2022–2023*. It encourages member States to engage in dialogue with standards development bodies in their jurisdiction to become signatories of the 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 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.”

* This document is submitted under the responsibility of the subgroup Chair and has not been subject to a substantive clearance procedure through the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division Director. This document has not been edited by a professional editor.

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 United Nations 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 (ToS-GRS) as a continuation of this work (ECE/EX/2022/L.13, 5d). The ToS-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 Salt of New Zealand as vice chair.

II. Report on progress of activities 2022-2023

3. The GRSI had a working meeting during this reporting period on 15 September 2022 (26 participants total/13 women). The ToS-GRS had working meetings on 14 December 2022 (11 participants total/9 women); on 8 February 2023 (31 participants total/24 women); on 18 April 2023 (24 participants total/15 women); and on 5 July 2023 (34 participants total/23 women). It had its first annual meeting on 24 May 2023 (57 participants total/40 women) which featured many of the return on experiences below.
4. The ToS-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), the ToS-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), the ToS-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 Committee for Standardization / European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CEN/CENELEC) (see below in the return on experience section, the update from some of these stakeholders). The ToS-GRS is encouraging others to respond and plans to develop a model best practice for gender action plans for standards development bodies based on the responses.
 - In support of paragraph 16(c), the ToS-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 will be made available online shortly.
 - In support of paragraph 16(e), the ToS-GRS has held regular meetings to discuss best practices, knowledge sharing and methodology. Five meetings were held; 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

5. The ToS-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.

6. 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 had a positive impact. Building upon this, a second gender action plan was approved in November 2022 for the period of 2023 to 2025. This plan is axed on awareness raising, supporting tools (and using tools that already exist such as those of the ToS-GRS) 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.

7. The Austrian Standards International (ASI) has implemented a gender action plan since 2022 with several actions. The first is on data collection / monitoring and ASI has been able to capture all of the data on participation in the technical committees and find relevant women experts for 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 would be launched soon. 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.

8. The Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) underlined the strengths that it had after signing the *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 as well as the gender equality seal programme which allows the private sector to declare their engagement on gender issues. The 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. The RSB is currently reviewing its strategic plan with an objective of promoting gender accountability in the areas of standards, certification, testing and metrology.

9. The Comisión Panamericana de Normas Técnicas (COPANT) signed the *Declaration* in March 2022 and 15 out of the 31 national standards bodies in the region have signed this declaration. Despite prevalent gender stereotypes in many of these countries there are ten national standards related to gender adopted in the region, often developed closely with regulators in their countries to help attain SDG 5 nationally. The 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>

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

11. 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 and 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 International further works on networking events, committee programs and standards development tools in order to empower their technical committee members.

12. Country experiences showed 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 recognizing the issues of safety and inclusiveness. Further awareness raising will be necessary.

B. Implementations

13. During this reporting period, there were seven new signatories to the *Declaration*: Deutschen Kommission Elektrotechnik Elektronik Informationstechnik (DKE) of Germany December 2022; Instituto Nacional de Calidad (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; KazStandards of Kazakhstan May 2023; and UL Standards and Engagements July 2023. This brings the total number of signatories up to 83. The full list is available on the dedicated webpage.³

C. Relation with other organizations’ work

14. The ToS-GRS leadership and the secretariat have made presentations about its work in multiple fora, including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Joint Advisory Group on Gender-Responsive Standards (JSAG) meeting in Stockholm Sweden on 24 April 2023, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) Telecommunication Standardization Sector (ITU-T) gender-responsive standards webinar on 4 May 2023, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (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, the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) side event during the World Trade Organization Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee meeting on 13 July 2023 and the 35th webinar of the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) on 26 July 2023. A Podcast on the topic was also held on 16 September 2022.⁵

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>

15. The work of ToS-GRS is cited by other organization such as the European Commission⁶ and national programmes. The ITU also issued an invitation on 24 January 2023 sent by its Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau, Seizo Onoe to their members, associate members and academia members to undertake the WP.6 LearnQI e-learning module on gender-responsive standards.⁷

IV. Pertinence of the topic today

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

17. A representative of the World Trade Organization (WTO) presented at the 24 May 2023 ToS-GRS 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 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.

18. The WTO also published *The Evolution of Gender-Related Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements*⁸ (RTA) in 2021. Out of 305 agreements, 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.

19. The United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report Office published their 2023 Gender Social Norms Index Report, *Breaking Down Gender Biases: Shifting social norms towards gender equality*⁹ and presented this at the ToS-GRS 5 July 2023 meeting. This report measures biases against women in eighty countries around four key dimensions: political, educational, economic and physical integrity where women and girls face systematic disadvantages and discrimination. The report reveals that there has been a decade of stagnation where there has been barely any reduction in bias against women. The educational dimension also reveals that there is a de-linkage between women's economic empowerment and gains in education. Much of the guidance provided in this report, such as increasing women's participation, engaging more women in leadership roles, ensuring that gender mainstreaming is not only a women's issue, avoiding harmful stereotypes – are all priorities shared in the *Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards* (ECE/TRADE/472).

V. Future directions

20. The ToS-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. The ToS-GRS also plans to explore further areas where it could provide guidance.

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

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

⁹ See: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>