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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

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Sixty-ninth session of the Economic Commission for Europe

ECE Executive Secretary 2nd Request to UN/CEFACT Chair and Reply

Summary

During the 10 July 2020, the Executive Committee (EXCOM) meeting invited relevant subsidiary bodies of the Commission to discuss how to reflect a COVID-19 response that supports further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their Programmes of Work and requests the secretariat to present an overview of these recommendations to EXCOM for consideration

On 21 July, the ECE Executive Secretary has addressed a letter to UN/CEFACT, through its Chair, requesting how UN/CEFACT and the secretariat would contribute to the medium- and long-term response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2020/INF.15 containing the letters sent by the UNECE Executive Secretary to the UN/CEFACT Chair and her reply is submitted to the Plenary for information.





21 July 2020

Ref.: 2020/OES/175

Dear Ms. Probert,

I have the pleasure of writing to you today with reference to my two earlier letters dated 18 February 2020 and 1 May 2020 related to the 2020 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) and the 69th session of UNECE to which the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business provided valuable input. Further, I would like to inform you about recent discussions at the Executive Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic, including on the request to solicit relevant inputs from the UNECE subsidiary bodies on the medium- and long-term response by UNECE.

1. Sectoral committee inputs for the HLPF

Pursuant to my letter of 18 February, the secretariat received substantial inputs on critical gaps and policy recommendations from the UNECE subsidiary bodies on the theme of “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”, as requested by the President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). I thank you very much for your submission, which will be useful not only for this exercise but also for the secretariat as we seek to best support member States in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. A synthesis of these submissions was reviewed by an informal meeting of the Executive Committee on 8 April 2020 (please refer to https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/Postponed_EXCOM_110_3_April_2020/Item_5_ECE_EX_2020_10_HLPF.pdf). Subsequently, it was forwarded to ECOSOC as input to the HLPF.

Ms. Sue Probert
Chairperson
United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
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The 2020 HLPF took place in a virtual format from 7 to 16 July. The event addressed many of the critical gaps indicated by the UNECE subsidiary bodies, in areas ranging from access to affordable, good quality energy to resilience and to climate related hazards and natural disasters. For an overview of UNECE contributions, please refer to <https://www.unece.org/?id=54715>).

2. Sectoral Committee inputs for the 69th session of UNECE

Pursuant to my letter of 1 May, the secretariat received substantial inputs from UNECE subsidiary bodies on activities related to the theme of the 69th Commission session, "Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region". A synthesis of the rich stocktake of relevant UNECE activities was presented to the Executive Committee on 10 July 2020 as part of the status update on the Commission preparation.

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_110_10_07_2020/Item_4_ECE_EX_2020_38_Commission_preparations.pdf

Please be informed that we anticipate that the high-level segment of the Commission session to gather ministers and deputy ministers from the countries of the region to exchange best practices on circular economy and chart a course for its expanded deployment over the subsequent two years. UNECE invites countries to submit voluntary commitments to the session, related to circularity and sustainable resource management at the country and transboundary levels. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, enhanced resilience and sustainable recovery will likewise be explored.

Over the summer, the secretariat will further review the inputs made to potential action items and areas that the membership may consider for draft decisions of the Commission. The secretariat looks forward to a strong collaboration with the UNECE subsidiary bodies in the further preparation of the session. I thank you for your valuable contributions to this process that will provide an excellent opportunity to obtain approval from member States for reframing or enhancing ongoing activities, as appropriate. The secretary supporting your Committee, as well as the Secretary of the Commission, Ms. Nicola Koch, (e-mail: unece.excom@un.org), stand ready to discuss further.

3. Call for sectoral Committee inputs on UNECE's COVID-19 response

Let me turn to an additional area on which I would welcome the contributions of your Committee – the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To inform discussions at the 10 July 2020 EXCOM meeting, the secretariat prepared a note on the COVID-19 crisis, focusing on the impact on UNECE's work, initial response activities by the subprogrammes, and further implications

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_110_10_07_2020/Item_3_ECE_EX_2020_37_COVID_19.pdf

Additionally, UNECE prepared an information brochure on the issue:

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/UNECE_COVID_Brochure_EN.pdf

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Inter alia, EXCOM “welcomed the efforts by the UNECE secretariat to step up its engagement at the country level and within the regional UN system in the context of the COVID-19 response and its commitment to develop working methods and organisational arrangements that facilitate this enhanced engagement, subject to available resources.”

Moreover, it decided to “invite relevant subsidiary bodies of the Commission to discuss how to reflect a COVID-19 response that supports further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their Programmes of Work and requests the secretariat to present an overview of these recommendations to EXCOM for consideration”.

I very much look forward to your thoughts on how we can further mainstream the COVID-19 response into our work and incorporate it into our upcoming Commission session. Please refer to the attached template for specific aspects that you may wish to cover in the response by your Committee and its subsidiaries. I would ask that you send your contribution no later than 1 November 2020 to the Secretary of the Commission, Ms. Nicola Koch (e-mail: unece.excom@un.org). Inputs received will be synthesized and submitted to the UNECE Executive Committee for consideration.

Review of existing meeting formats and servicing arrangements

Finally, I would like to draw to your attention the a related EXCOM decision of 10 July 2020, namely the request for “the UNECE secretariat to present a proposal for an extrabudgetary project on a review of existing meeting formats and servicing arrangements, including for capacity-building activities, drawing on the lessons from the COVID-19 response, and provide recommendations to EXCOM for consideration.”

The secretariat will elaborate a project proposal and, if approved and funded by the membership later this year, looks forward to working with all stakeholders, including the Bureau and secretariat of your Committee, to discuss experiences gathered during the COVID pandemic, particularly related to meeting formats and servicing arrangements, and jointly explore possible future opportunities to strengthen the working methods of UNECE subsidiary bodies.



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On behalf of the UNECE secretariat, I wish good health and a restful summer to you, the members of your Committee and your families.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Olga Algayerova".

Olga Algayerova

Enclosure

cc: Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division,
UNECE

Mr. Lance Thompson, Secretary of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation
and Electronic Business

Annex: Template for reporting by UN/CEFACT on the decision by the Executive Committee related to UNECE's COVID-19 response

The Executive Committee “invites relevant subsidiary bodies of the Commission to discuss how to reflect a COVID-19 response that supports further progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in their Programmes of Work and requests the secretariat to present an overview of these recommendations to EXCOM for consideration.”

1. Context of the overall COVID-19 response that supports further progress towards the 2030 Agenda

In particular, you may want to address the following aspects:

- *What is the goal of the overall response? Why is it necessary?*
- *How is being implemented? (new/repurposed/refocussed activities, partnerships, working methods...)*
- *How do you propose to deal with increased operational risk/uncertainty?*
- *What are the channels through which the COVID-19 response proposed can support SDG acceleration?*

(Please focus on forward-looking initiatives that relate to medium- and long-term activities and supplement UNECE's early response.

Initial action is already well documented – pls refer to

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/Remote_informal_mtg_20_05_2020/ECE_COVID19_Instruments_080520.pdf

https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/UNECE_COVID_Brochure_EN.pdf.

(700 words max, pls)

As outlined in the UNECE's “Responding to the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in the UNECE region”, UN/CEFACT has developed nearly five hundreds freely available policy recommendations and eBusiness standards that enable dematerialized and streamlined trade/regulatory processes, and transparency and traceability of global value chains . These deliverables form a solid foundation for all trade-related electronic exchanges, which contribute to reducing human contact, speeding up the movement of goods (including those used to combat the pandemic), and supporting compliance with policy/regulatory requirements, including on health and safety criteria. This is standardized at a global level, ensuring that global value chains can exchange goods and related information in a harmonized way.

The implementation of these deliverables has not always been easy as this can be technical in nature and there are some processes which were until now only partially standardized. For these reasons, and to support member States dealing with the COVID-19, a set of projects have been put together to repurpose some existing eBusiness standards as well as enhance the existing coverage of these standards in order to provide a comprehensive set of tools for governments and the trading community.

This has included the following work:

- International transport and forwarding messages (including Booking, Waybill and Status messages)
- Packing list messages
- Rapid Alert Security for Food and Feed messages (RASFF)
- Enhancing the multi-modal reach of all transport-related eBusiness standards, integrating air, rail and inland waterway needs (maritime and road is already comprehensively covered)
- Preferential Certificate of Origin using Blockchain
- eQuality and eCITES Certificates
- Cross-Industry Supply Chain Track and Trace of the physical movement of logistics goods
- Traceability and Transparency of sustainable Value Chains in Textile and Leather, which directly contributes to achieving SDG targets 12.6 and 8 for responsible production and consumption.

These standards complete an already extensive set of eBusiness standards that cover the needs of the entire supply chain.

These will continue to be maintained to ensure that the needs of all modes of transport and all sectors of activity are covered.

These include:

- Supply Chain Cross-Industry family of documents (including eInvoicing – the UN/CEFACT Cross Industry Invoice eBusiness standard is an obligatory standard for all public institutes within the European Union --, Ordering Process, Quotation, Catalogue, Scheduling, Delivery, Remittance Advice and the Supply Chain Reference Data Model)
- Transport and Logistics processes (Internet-of-Things Smart Container, electronic road consignment note [eCMR], Data Pipeline and the Multi-Modal Transport Reference Data Model)
- Certificates and agriculture processes (animal traceability, primary natural products traceability, Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange [UN/FLUX], electronic animal passport, electronic laboratory observation reporting [eLabs], agriculture quality certificates and electronic sanitary-phytosanitary certificates [eCERT])
- Environmental processes (transboundary movement of waste [electronic messages corresponding to the Basil Convention])
- Health processes (UN/EDIFACT health insurance standards)

UN/CEFACT also prepared guidance material on trade-related aspects to pandemic crisis such as COVID-19. The document provides guidance to governments on considerations to be taken in order to ensure that trade can continue during a pandemic (both for the flow of relief aid or essential supplies, but also for all legitimate trade). This should contribute to lessening economic slowdowns because of curfews, lockdowns or other measures. This project was launched in June as soon as the new UN/CEFACT Bureau was put in place, the resulting White Paper was approved by the Bureau on 19 October 2020 and is ready for publication. This guidance can assist in reducing uncertainty for traders linked to the movement of their goods, ensuring that livelihoods are maintained and contributing to SDG target 9.1.

The Advisory Group on Advanced technologies in Trade and Logistics, prepared a report on Report on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on international trade and logistics and the ways advanced technologies can help overcome such disruptions. The Report identifies the main areas in which advanced technologies can contribute to economic measures when coping with the negative impact of COVID-19 on international trade and logistics and contributing to SDG 9 and 17.

2. Specific adjustments proposed to the Programme of Work

Changes proposed to the PoW <i>(pls cite specific document references, if available)</i>	Rationale of the specific changes proposed, incl. expected impact and risk mitigation considerations 200 words max per entry, pls	Main policy goals under UNECE Action Framework ¹ <i>(pls indicate A/B/C and elaborate details)</i>	Link to 2030 Agenda <i>(pls specify relevant SDG)</i>
All eBusiness standards allowing the electronic exchange of information	The UN/CEFACT Programme of Work already includes the development and maintenance of eBusiness standards related to trade and the movement of goods. In the current context of COVID-19, this mission becomes essential in order to reduce human contact, streamline processes and supporting compliance with policy/regulatory requirements. UN/CEFACT shall plan to redouble its efforts in this area. It is expected that this will help to enable countries and companies to be more resilient	This will directly support A) Facilitate connectivity and C) Support a green and resilient recovery. The Nexus publication on Sustainable Mobility and Smart Connectivity provides clear details on how eBusiness standards contribute to connectivity. UN/CEFACT standards will also help to further facilitate trade internationally, using freely available consensual standards developed	1.4, 5.b, 9.1, 10.1, 17.7, 17.10

¹ A. Facilitate connectivity; B. Address transboundary and other risks; C. Support a green and resilient recovery
(For more details on the UNECE action framework, pls consult informal document 2020/37 presented to EXCOM on 10 July 2020, entitled “COVID-19 Crisis: impact, initial response and further implications for UNECE work”
https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2020/EXCOM_110_10_07_2020/Item_3_ECE_EX_2020_37_COVID_19.pdf)

Changes proposed to the PoW <i>(pls cite specific document references, if available)</i>	Rationale of the specific changes proposed, incl. expected impact and risk mitigation considerations 200 words max per entry, pls	Main policy goals under UNECE Action Framework¹ <i>(pls indicate A/B/C and elaborate details)</i>	Link to 2030 Agenda <i>(pls specify relevant SDG)</i>
	and be better prepared to address supply chain disruptions.	under the UN and thus ensuring global connectivity.	
Paperless trade and traceability of sustainable and circular supply chains (agri-food, garment and footwear)	The UN/CEFACT Programme of Work already includes the development and maintenance of traceability standards of sustainable and circular supply chains linked to fisheries, textile, natural resources, plant-based and animal-based materials and products). The UN/CEFACT PoW foresees to further develop standards for paperless agri-food/garment&footwear trade to support member states in its implementation. In the ongoing crisis UN/CEFACT eBusiness and Trade Facilitation standards significantly contribute to the resilience of global agri-food and garment&footwear trade and the implementation of paperless trade has now become a priority of many governments. UN/CEFACT shall plan to redouble its efforts in developing standards for paperless trade and in supporting governments in its implementation in these priority sectors.	This will directly support B) Address transboundary and other risks – and indirectly support A) Facilitate connectivity and C) Support a green and resilient recovery.	2, 3, 8, 12, 14, 17
Traceability standards (transport & logistics)	The UN/CEFACT Programme of Work already includes the development and maintenance of traceability standards under its Transport and Logistics domain (IoT-Smart Containers, Data Pipeline exchange of data, Cross Industry Supply Chain Traceability...). In the context of COVID-19, these standards provide much	This will directly support B) Address transboundary and other risks – and indirectly support A) Facilitate connectivity.	9, 17

Changes proposed to the PoW <i>(pls cite specific document references, if available)</i>	Rationale of the specific changes proposed, incl. expected impact and risk mitigation considerations 200 words max per entry, pls	Main policy goals under UNECE Action Framework¹ <i>(pls indicate A/B/C and elaborate details)</i>	Link to 2030 Agenda <i>(pls specify relevant SDG)</i>
	<p>needed guidance on improving supply chain resilience. UN/CEFACT shall plan to redouble its efforts in this area.</p> <p>It is expected that this will help to facilitate any shifts in movement of goods caused by restrictions related to pandemics.</p>		
<p>Guidance documents on relief efforts</p>	<p>The UN/CEFACT Programme of Work already included work on guidance (recommendation) on disaster relief. This was expanded in June 2020 to allow the development of a specific deliverable on Pandemic Crisis trade-related issues. These are obviously directly related to COVID-19 and provide guidance on measures that governments can take to ensure that trade can continue to flow in the event of a crisis. The final work should be presented to the 2021 Plenary. UN/CEFACT shall consider if further guidance in this area is necessary or if this might be the subject of future capacity building work.</p> <p>It is expected that this will help to avoid disruptions in trade in the event of a crisis.</p>	<p>This will directly support B) Address transboundary and other risks – and indirectly support A) Facilitate connectivity and C) Support a resilient recovery.</p>	<p>9, 17</p>
<p>National Trade Facilitation Roadmaps</p>	<p>The UN/CEFACT Programme of Work already includes capacity building activities, especially linked to the development of comprehensive trade facilitation roadmaps at the country level. The next Programme of Work will include measures to allow the finalization of a national trade facilitation roadmap for sustainable recovery from COVID-19 under a</p>	<p>This will directly support B) Address transboundary and other risks – and indirectly support A) Facilitate connectivity and C) Support a resilient recovery.</p>	<p>9, 17</p>

Changes proposed to the PoW <i>(pls cite specific document references, if available)</i>	Rationale of the specific changes proposed, incl. expected impact and risk mitigation considerations 200 words max per entry, pls	Main policy goals under UNECE Action Framework¹ <i>(pls indicate A/B/C and elaborate details)</i>	Link to 2030 Agenda <i>(pls specify relevant SDG)</i>
	<p>project for Kyrgyzstan. The Programme of Work foresees the development of similar roadmaps in other countries of the UNECE region. These roadmaps provide essential guidance to countries to set a vision, identify goals and priority activities through an all-of-government approach to sustainable trade facilitation reforms. Such reforms help countries to streamline trade processes, improve digitalisation and be more resilient when facing a crisis such as COVID-19. UN/CEFACT shall plan to reinforce its efforts in this area.</p> <p>It is expected that this will support countries to be more resilient when facing a crisis like COVID-19.</p>		
UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation	The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is carried out biennially by all the UN Regional Commissions to assess progress of trade facilitation reforms. From 2021, this survey will include an additional component on impacts of COVID-19 and best practices adopted by countries. UNECE is currently pilot-testing the additional component in Kyrgyzstan and will carry out a full-fledged survey in early 2021.	This will directly support A) Facilitate connectivity and B) Address transboundary and other risks	9, 17

3. Recommendations on how to reflect COVID-19 response into the programme of the 2021 Commission session

On 10 July 2020, EXCOM “requested the UNECE secretariat to include its COVID-19 response into further programme planning for the sixty-ninth session of the Commission”.

Suggestions for elements of the Commission programme may relate to

- a) the overarching theme of the high-level segment “Promoting circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources”;*
- b) elements for a separate programme segment; or*
- c) a stand-alone side event.*

(200 words max per entry, pls)

eBusiness standards, enabling dematerialization, are only relevant insofar as they are mutually agreed and used by relevant stakeholders. In order to reap the full benefits of digitalization, the government and private-sector stakeholders need to use the same standards or at the very least, the same semantic base.

UN/CEFACT foresees the launch of a Call to Action to improve the use and implementation of UN/CEFACT semantics and Reference Data Models for dematerialization in the UNECE region and beyond.

UN/CEFACT is considering the possibility of a seminar on the implementation of transport related eBusiness standards in a corridor between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. This would support government to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and encourage the use of UN/CEFACT standards to reap the maximum benefits to facilitate their processes and streamline freight movement along this corridor. Providing a standards-based approach to electronic communication along such a corridor (with standards freely available to all) will contribute to SDG acceleration, notably to target 1.4, 5.b, 9.1, 10.1, 17.7 and especially 17.10. Building this electronic exchange of information and standardizing the processes is critical in response to COVID in order to reduce human contacts while at the same time keeping trade flowing to ensure a certain level of economic growth.
