Report of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Task Force on its Kick-off Meeting on 28 September 2023

I.   Introduction and attendance

1.   The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Task Force was launched at its kick-off meeting on 28 September 2023. The meeting was held in a virtual mode and was attended by 37 experts. The representatives of the following United Nations bodies and organizations, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations participated in the meeting: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the International Organization of Standardization (ISO), the Ship Message Design Group (SMDG) and the Digital Container Shipping Association (DCSA). The UN/LOCODE National Focal Points for the following countries participated: Brazil, China, France, Germany and Morocco.

II.   Opening remarks

2.   In the absence of the Chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group, the Vice Chair of the Group opened the meeting by welcoming the experts.

- Firstly, she highlighted the importance of UN/LOCODE as an internationally recognized code to enable businesses to efficiently and accurately identify and track goods.
- Secondly, she pointed out that the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group in its 2023 meeting in May to deliberate on the key maintenance policy issues, and recommended the establishment of a single task force, led by the Vice Chair and supported by the secretariat, to systematically address these challenges raised recently during the UN/LOCODE maintenance (Decision 23-16).
- Thirdly, she overviewed the expected outcomes of the Task Force and called for experts, including volunteer leader(s) to each issue/task specified in the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the Task Force, to address, in a collaborative way, the critical issues.
- Finally, she expressed her gratitude to the experts for their on-going support and the secretariat for their excellent services.

III. Report from the secretariat

3.   The Secretary of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group presented the ToR of the UN/LOCODE Task Force, including the Task Force's objective, scope, activities, and mode of operation:

- Establishment of the UN/LOCODE Task Force in response to the raised maintenance policy issues and decisions from the 2023 Meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group.

- Four subgroups to be set up under the UN/LOCODE Task Force:
  - Subgroup 1: Identification of small fishery ports in the FAO Global Record.

  - Subgroup 2: Feasibility study to fast-track the UN/LOCODE as an ISO standard.

- Subgroup 3: Address the co-existence of UN/LOCODEs assigned to locations (areas) and sub-locations (points).

- Subgroup 4: Testing of the new re-engineered online data maintenance request (DMR) application.

- Call for participation in one or more tasks/subgroups on a voluntary basis; regular coordination meetings and working meetings of each subgroup to be organized.

- Report and recommendations to be submitted to the ECE secretariat by the first week of April 2024, before the final submission to the 2024 meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group for approval.

- The 2024 Meeting of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group scheduled for 6 - 7 May 2024 and hosted by Hapag-Lloyd in Hamburg, Germany.

IV. Presentations and insights

4.   The ECE secretariat delivered a presentation on the front-end of the UN/LOCODE application to be re-engineered for the Data Maintenance Request online submission:

- Critical issues in the current UN/LOCODE application to be addressed including cyber security vulnerabilities, data quality and validation errors, and outdated technical infrastructure.

- A target date of 30 December 2023 set to resolve all cyber security risks, in alignment with the recommendations of the Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT).

- Assessment and technical steps involving leveraging the existing Microsoft infrastructure, transitioning from .NET Framework 4.0 to 4.8.1, utilizing ECE Jira for issue tracking, and ECE Bitbucket for code revision management, with comprehensive testing by the ECE secretariat and the UN/LOCODE community.

- Possible improvements centred on field validation, integrated geolocation referencing, data quality and integration, user notifications, electronic data service and the incorporation of Two-Factor Authentication/Multi-Factor Authentication (2FA/MFA).

- Challenges including complexity in the source code and the legacy software development pattern, cost of third-party services for interactive mapping, availability of reference data and data integration between the supporting sub-systems.

- A possible wireframe of the re-engineered application including a re-engineered frontend submission, 2FA authentication, an internal system menu, and various user-centric functionalities.

5.   The representative of the China National Institute of Standardization (CNIS) briefed on his findings and proposals on the co-existence of point-locations and area-locations in the current code list:

- The significance of preserving legacy UN/LOCODEs assigned for sub-locations and the absence of child code solutions to identify various facilities. In this context, an official child code might be a potential solution.

- In the current UN/LOCODE code list, many UN/LOCODE entries use such symbols as ',', '()' and '/', to specify sub-locations. This implicit system can be formalized through standardizing naming conventions.

- A mechanism to be established to offer a separate view of the UN/LOCODE code list with a list of city codes and a list of Official Child Code (OCC) codes linked to their respective parent city codes.

6.   The Chair of the ISO Technical Committee 154 (ISO/TC 154) introduced collaborative joint activities between ISO/TC154 and UNECE:

- The ISO fast-track procedure to adopt a UN/CEFACT standard as an ISO standard. An example is a project under ISO/TC 154 to fast-track the UN/CEFACT Buy-Ship-Pay Reference Data Model as ISO 20197.

- The updates on the new joint working group between ISO/TC154 and UNECE (ISO/TC 154/JWG 9) with the scope of the development and maintenance of standards for information exchange in the supply chain aligned to UN/CEFACT semantics, excluding the standards related to EDIFACT Syntax under ISO/TC 154/JWG1.

- The comparison of standards related to locations developed by ISO, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and GS1, and in the absence of an ISO standard to serve as a physical positioning location code used in the global supply chain, the potential adoption of UN/LOCODE as an ISO standard to address this gap.

7.   The representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) overviewed the importance of information exchange for sustainable fisheries especially identifying fishery ports:

- The Global Record Informal Open-Ended Technical and Advisory Working Group (GRWG) made a recommendation at its sixth meeting on 12 December 2022 regarding UN/LOCODE as an identifier for the port of registry of fishing vessels uploaded on the Global Record. GRWG welcomed the ECE secretariat providing a process whereby ports not currently registered with a UN/LOCODE could be registered within six months of asking, and that new types or categories of ports could be added to the UN/LOCODE directory in the future if deemed necessary. GRWG also expressed concern that six months can be too long in some cases.

- Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE) made a recommendation at its third meeting on 13-14 December 2022 concerning the use of UN/LOCODE for identifying designated ports (DPs) under the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA). TWG-IE highlighted the importance of ensuring that all designated ports under PSMA are associated with a UN/LOCODE when possible. This recommendation was submitted to the Fourth Meeting of the Parties to the PSMA (MOP4) held on 8-12 May 2023 in Bali, Indonesia.

V. Conclusion and wrap-up

8.   The ECE secretariat confirmed with each presenter on the task/topic mentioned above to undertake leadership for their respective subgroup; except the leadership of Subgroup 1 pending for confirmation from the FAO secretariat, the leadership of the subgroups was clarified as follows:

- Subgroup 1: Pending for confirmation of the FAO secretariat.

- Subgroup 2: Led by the Chair of ISO/TC 154.

- Subgroup 3: Led by the representative of CNIS.

- Subgroup 4: Led by the ECE secretariat.

9.   The Vice Chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group emphasized the importance of continuous collaboration to touch base for subsequent coordination meetings with the ECE secretariat and the leaders of each subgroup.

10.   All attendees were encouraged to contact the ECE secretariat if they were interested in contributing further to any of the subgroups or had additional insights to share.

11.   The Vice Chair expressed her gratitude to all attendees, especially to the ECE secretariat, the presenters, the UN/LOCODE National Focal Points, and the experts who dedicated their time and expertise. She expected to make progress by the UN/LOCODE Task Force and submit the report and the recommendations to the next Advisory Group meeting in 2024.

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