Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

**Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation
and Standardization Policies (WP.6)**

Thirty-second session
Geneva, 7–9 November 2022
Item 3 of the provisional agenda
Matters arising

Report from the Bureau of Working Party 6

Submitted by the WP.6 Bureau

Summary

The objective of this report is to shortly highlight some work that the Bureau for the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) has undertaken in 2022 to better navigate given the ever-increasing challenges presented in the field of technical regulation for industrial goods.

Document (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/INF.1) is submitted by the WP.6 Bureau to the thirty-second annual session for information.

I. Introduction

1.   The Bureau of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) was renewed and enhanced in November 2021 with the election of a new chair and two new vice chairs. Together with the vice chair elected in 2020, the Bureau has steered the workflows within WP.6 as well as the areas of activities of each subgroup and initiative. There have been multiple meetings of the Bureau and of the Bureau with the larger leadership of the subgroups and initiatives to bring everyone together on a common mission to address challenges of a changing environment.

2.   Over the past decade, the work of WP.6 has broadened, and many subgroups and initiatives have embraced new areas while some earlier work has reached its full potential. As a result, the WP.6 Bureau has identified a need to initiate several internal processes to streamline the work under the umbrella of the Working Party. The objective of these processes has been to bring to light the unique value of the work that the subgroups and initiatives create.

3.   Additional work has been undertaken to enhance the communication and outreach of the work under WP.6. This aims to further ensure visibility of the linkages in all of the workflows as well as to enhance engagement of member States, organizations and regulators not previously active in the WP.6 community.

II. What changing environment?

4.   Today, when developing regulations, while aiming to minimize barriers to trade, Government regulators and standard developing organizations (SDO) need to not only consider the scientific justification for safety or environmental objectives, but also consider numerous other aspects (e.g. commitments provided by the United Nation's Agenda 2030 for sustainable development and a multitude of aspects related to digitalization such as privacy, cybersecurity and resilience).

5.   Many of these changes have resulted in new proposals for regulation. In practice this often means the introduction of new horizontal regulatory layers on top of sector specific regulations without full certainty about how various policies, initiatives and regulations complement each other. This can potentially result in regulatory fragmentation, uncertainty for business and also risk increasing barriers to trade.

At the same time, the main regulatory tools that are used to enhance regulatory coherence such as technical regulation and international standards are challenged by fast technological development and innovation. Governments need to have a timely regulatory response. WP.6 as an international forum thus has a crucial role in supporting member States, not only by highlighting decisive regulatory tendencies but also, when possible, pointing out paths forward and identifying efficient tools for international regulatory cooperation.

III. Renewed terms of reference

6.   As required by an internal review of WP.6 (see ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2019/4) and to respond to the above challenges, WP.6 has proposed a new terms of reference (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/11). This document includes in paragraph 5 a revised mission statement holding firmly to the primary goal, which is to address technical barriers to trade:

- WP.6 aims to promote regulatory cooperation, standardization policies and activities which contribute towards reducing technical barriers to trade, promoting sustainable development in all its dimensions including, for example, gender equality, climate and environmental protection, circular economy and the adaptation to new technologies.

7.   This new mission statement integrates specific attention to themes which have been identified by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) as priorities, such as the promotion of "circular economy approaches and the sustainable use of natural resources" at its sixty-ninth session of the Commission and "digital and green transformations

for sustainable development in the ECE region" at the forthcoming seventieth session of the Commission. These themes are fully integrated into the Programme of Work of WP.6 for 2023 (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/12, paragraphs 5 to 7).
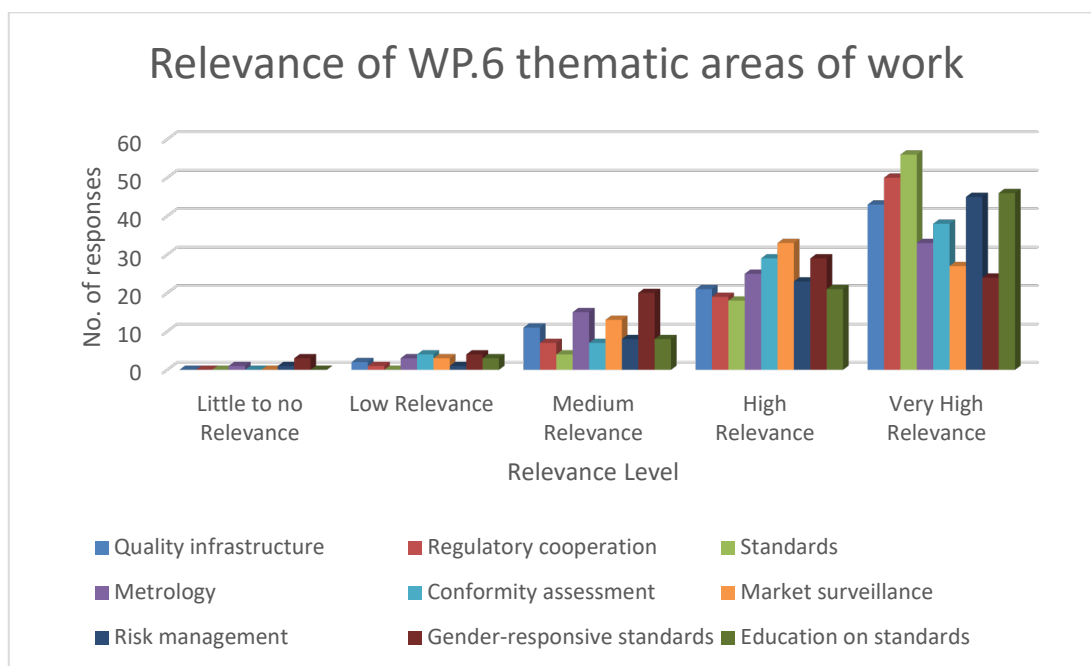
IV.   Enhanced coordination of WP.6 workflows

8.   An enhanced dialogue between the Bureau and leadership of the subgroups and initiatives was launched in early 2022. The objective has been to identify the unique value that is created by each subgroup and initiative and to confirm that there is no major duplication of efforts of work carried out within other organizations. Each subgroup and initiative provided details about their work, which is being used by the secretariat to update and streamline the information on the WP.6 website. It is hoped that this will provide more clarity of all the valuable work carried out under the WP.6 umbrella.

V.   Questionnaire to the experts of WP.6

9.   The Bureau also launched a questionnaire to the WP.6 expert community and member States to enquire about the potential areas of activity for future work within WP.6. The questionnaire was sent in Spring of 2022 with a specific focus on current work and future priorities.

10.   Seventy-eight experts responded to the questionnaire. Among the questions, it was asked how relevant each thematic area of WP.6 is to the objectives and focus set out in its mission statement. All areas were deemed relevant to very relevant; the breakdown is presented in the following graphic. We can conclude that WP.6 is working within its declared mission.

Source: UNECE. Questionnaire to experts in WP.6.

11.   Some of the other conclusions from this survey include:

- There is trust among the respondents that WP.6 can integrate the objectives of the UN Agenda 2030 into its work. The sustainable development goals (SDG) to which WP.6 can most contribute are Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Gender Equality (SGD 5) and Quality Education (SDG 4).

- Areas of regulatory cooperation, standardization and education on standards were especially pertinent for the WP.6 community, followed by risk management and quality infrastructure

- There is knowledge about the various sub-groups and initiatives under WP.6, but more work needs to be done to communicate efficiently about the various thematic areas as well as to try engaging more stakeholders, especially regulators

12.   The survey also confirmed the need identified by the WP.6 Bureau to more closely follow-up on the work and to highlight more clearly in which manner the deliverables generated by WP.6 are used by member States.

13.   When it comes to the working format, the survey pointed out that the in-person annual sessions were important for networking. As a result, the Bureau has requested that the annual sessions be once again in-person meetings, starting with the thirty-second session in November 2022, knowing that increasing in-person attendance to the level before the pandemic will probably take some time.

Annex I

Key deliverables of WP.6 and its secretariat

I. Deliverables during the period November 2021 – November 2022

- Recommendation V on Addressing Product Non-Compliance Risks in International Trade in document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2021/5

- Revised Recommendation P on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems in document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2020/11

- Updated Standards4SDGs portal (https://standards4sdgs.unece.org/) mapping over 20,000 standards from all major international standards development organizations, mapped across all seventeen SDGs, 40 case studies and 10 expert comment pieces

II. Meetings and events during the period November 2021 – November 2022

- 16 November 2021, online only, Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative meeting

- 23 November 2021, online only, Sixth meeting of the START-Ed Initiative, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/359489

- 24 November 2021, online only, Annual meeting of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/352541

- 24–26 November 2021, hybrid, Geneva, Thirty-first Session of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6), https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/352542

- 16 December 2022, online only, Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems meeting

- 13 January 2022, online only, WP.6 Bureau meeting

- 10 February 2022, online only, WP.6 Bureau meeting with the leadership of the subgroups and initiatives

- 15 February 2022, online only, Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative meeting

- 24 February 2022, online only, Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems meeting

- 6 April 2022, online only, (during the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development) "Standards are a catalyst to achieving the SDGs," https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366293

- 13 April 2022, online only, Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative meeting

- 26 April - 04 May 2022, online only, Gender-Responsive Standards Workshop, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366923

- 29 April 2022, online only, WP.6 Bureau meeting

- 1–10 June 2022, WP.6 Forum

  o 1 June 2022, hybrid, Geneva, "Gender-responsive standards: bringing standards for sustainable development and gender-equality to standards development bodies," https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366556

  o 7 June 2022, online only, Annual session of the Ad-Hoc Team of Specialists START and its initiatives, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366792

   o 7 June 2022, online only, START-Ed Annual meeting, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366793

   o 8 June 2022, online only, "Gender, digitalization, environment: ensuring a sustainable future for all," https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366794

   o 9 June 2022, online only, "Risk Management in Regulatory Frameworks: Towards the Better Management of Risks," https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366769

   o 10 June 2022, online only, "Best practices in Market Surveillance and border controls," https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366795

- 2 June 2022, online only, Recommendation T revision project team meeting

- 7 July 2022, online only, WP.6 Bureau meeting

- 15 September 2022, online only, Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative meeting, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/370251

- 22 September 2022, online only, Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems meeting, https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/370252

III. Liaison activities during the period November 2021 – November 2022

- 10–12 November 2021, hybrid Geneva, World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade Committee (TBT) meeting

- 15 December 2021, online only, OECD IO Partnership meeting

- 15 December 2021, online only, International Network on Quality Infrastructure (INetQI) 8th meeting

- 25 January 2022, online only, ITC "Development of WTO Gender-Lens Framework"

- 25 February 2022, online only, OECD IO Partnership meeting

- 7 April 2022, online only (during the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, in partnership with UN-Women), "SDG5: Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic," https://regionalforum.unece.org/events/session-5-sdg-5-accelerators-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-context-covid-19

- 21 April 2022, online only, OECD IO Partnership Technical Meeting

- 17 May 2022, online only, UN/CEFACT Forum Single Window Domain meeting

- 13-15 July 2022, hybrid, Geneva, WTO TBT meeting

- 21 July 2022, online only, 9th INetQI meeting

- 16–18 November 2022, hybrid, Geneva, WTO TBT meeting

IV. News pieces

- 17 February 2022, "Strengthening women's participation in the standards development process, with UNECE guidelines," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/press/365198

- 9 March 2022, "UNECE launches world's largest repository of standards mapped to the SDGs," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/press/365705

- 10 May 2022, "UNECE helps standards developers to strengthen gender-responsiveness," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/news/367399

- 16 May 2022, "Standards are a catalyst for the achievement of sustainable development," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/news/367556

- 25 May 2022, "UNECE Forum to focus on role of product standards for advanced technologies and sustainability," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/news/367848

- 5 September 2022, "Managing Risk for Post-Pandemic Trade: UNECE and ITC launch a Guide for Border Regulators," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/press/370255

- 4 October 2022, "Setting the standards for women's inclusion," https://unece.org/media/news/371419

- 14 October 2022, "On World Standards Day, UNECE launches new e-learning module on standards," https://unece.org/media/trade/wp.6%20meetings/news/371858

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