Economic and Social Council

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

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

Thirty-fourth session
Geneva, 26(pm)–28 August 2024
Item 7 of the provisional agenda
Programme of work

Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2025

Submitted by the Bureau*

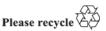*Summary*

This document presents the detailed *Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies* based on the *Draft programme of work of the Trade subprogramme for 2025* (ECE/CTCS/2024/13) to be endorsed during the ninth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards on 26–28 June 2024.

This document is presented to the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) for decision.

Proposed decisions:

"Member States adopt the *Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies for 2025* (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2024/14)."

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* This document has not been edited by a professional editor.

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I. Introduction

1.   The *Programme of work of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)* aims to create value to sustainable international trade through best practices identified with member States and industry. As per its terms of reference (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2022/11), 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". This work is vested in the Regulatory Cooperation Unit of the Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

2.   The objective, the strategy, the planned results and the deliverables in the programme of work correspond to those contained in the ECE *Proposed programme budget for 2024* (A/79/6 (Sect. 20)/Part A). The deliverables planned in this document for WP.6 are presented in annex. The work of the subprogramme is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

II. Relation to overall objectives within the United Nations

3.   WP.6 is in a unique position to support multiple objectives of the United Nations and ECE. It works on quality infrastructure which, among other things, ensures that goods put on the market are compliant with applicable regulations. This is done, for example, through the use of standards. Through its gender-responsive standards initiative, WP.6 has demonstrated that if gender mainstreaming aspects are taken into account at the level of standards development, the resulting goods, processes and services will be gender-responsive. A similar approach can be taken on other cross-cutting topics and help contribute to ensuring that products on the market have taken into account key objectives such as sustainability, circularity, digitalization, or disaster risk reduction.

A. Sustainable Development Goals

4.   WP.6 has been deeply engaged in mapping standards to SDGs and providing guidance on how standards can help to achieve the SDGs. Efforts will be made to continue enhancing and updating the Standards 4 SDG portal.[1] WP.6 contributes, among others to improving gender equality (SDG 5), fostering decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), providing quality infrastructure (SDG 9), supporting circular economy approaches (SDG 12), and working through partnerships (SDG 17). The projects of WP.6 plan to continue to support SDGs throughout 2025.

B. Circular economy

5.   At the sixty-ninth session of ECE held on 20 and 21 April 2021, member States committed to step up efforts to promote circular economy approaches and sustainable use of natural resources in the existing relevant ECE sectoral work programmes as appropriate (E/2021/37-E/ECE/1494). WP.6 has integrated this theme into many of its workstreams and plans to continue exploring ways to support circularity throughout 2025.

C. Digital and green transformations

6.   At the seventieth session of ECE, held on 18 and 19 April 2023, member States committed to support digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region (E/ECE/1504). The third forum of subgroups of WP.6 dedicated its conferences

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[1] See: https://standards4sdgs.unece.org/

to this theme and demonstrates how the various angles of quality infrastructure for trade contribute to this theme (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2024/3). WP.6 has developed guidance on artificial intelligence from both a control perspective of products integrating such technologies (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2024/11) and from a risk management perspective of regulatory objectives (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2023/9) and plans to develop further guidance on the topic. Work on this theme is planned to continue in 2025.

7.	WP.6 seeks to promote further horizontal guidance across its subgroups with respect to regulatory challenges related to digitalization. This includes topics like cybersecurity, privacy, artificial intelligence and data-based products.

## D.	Disaster risk reduction

8.	Responding to the dramatic increase in extreme weather events and mega-disasters is one of the greatest challenges of our present age. Climate change, rapid urbanization and population growth in hazard-prone cities and coastal areas make action all the more urgent. This is outlined in the *United Nations Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction for Resilience* (see background document presented to the 2018 annual session, agenda item 6). WP.6 and its secretariat shall continue to work on presenting and orienting its pertinent work which can help to support the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

# III.	Highlights of expected achievements during 2025

9.	Concerning all areas of work, WP.6 and its subgroups plan to:

(a) Review existing recommendations and guidance material (beyond those specifically listed elsewhere in this document) to evaluate if revisions or modifications are necessary with a view to ensuring regulatory harmonization and continued relevance;

(b)	Enhance cooperation and liaison through the secretariat of WP.6 with customs agencies, other government agencies, and other international organizations with an objective to improve and harmonize quality infrastructure (the WP.6 secretariat participates in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade Committee (TBT) meetings and the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender; it maintains a type-A liaison with the International Organization for Standardisation Technical Committee on Risk Management (ISO TC 262); it maintains regular contact with the central secretariats of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), UN-Women and other bodies on gender-related issues; and it also participates in the Network of Quality Infrastructure Bodies (iNetQI) meetings);

(c)	Develop materials (presentation slide deck, resources, media content) that can be used to raise awareness and disseminate existing materials and promote the work of WP.6 and its subgroups, eventually catered to different types of audience.

## A.	Market surveillance

10.	Market surveillance enables Governments to ensure that products comply with mandatory regulatory requirements. The Advisory Group on Market Surveillance (MARS) develops and promotes best practice guidelines that serve as a reference framework for Governments.

11.	In the area of market surveillance, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)	Review for possible updates linked to digitalization and sustainability the *Recommendation N on Good Market Surveillance Policies and Practices*; a webinar in support of this topic could also be planned;

(b)	Continue exchanges of experience in the area of market surveillance in order to identify and bring forward best practices in this field while further developing the network of global and regional market surveillance entities;

(c)   Explore how market surveillance may better regulate digital vulnerabilities and how to harmonize these among regulatory agencies;

(d)   Explore how societal concerns (e.g. mental health of children, labour rights, or other) resulting from digital services affect product characteristics and how these requirements are formulated in technical regulation (and how this then impacts product safety enforcement);

(e)   Develop a *Market Surveillance Model Initiative Guide to the Use of the General Market Surveillance Procedures* covering all phases of market surveillance from planning of inspections to dangerous product recall.

B.   Risk management

12.   Risk management aims to safeguard against hazards that stem from the quality of products and services – or lack thereof – that have the potential to cause harm or damage the health and safety of consumers and the environment. Standards and technical regulations are – among other things – risk mitigation tools and they should be proportionate to risks they were set out to address. Development and enforcement of regulations require application of state-of-the-art risk management tools. Taken collectively, regulations make products safe, make organizations' processes stable and ensure consumers are better protected from hazards. The Group of Experts on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems (GRM) is the focal point within WP.6 for this work.

13.   In the area of risk management, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)   Analyse the survey on the application of crisis management principles described in *Recommendation P on Risk Management in Regulatory Systems* during the COVID-19 crisis;

(b)   Continue exchanges of experience in the area of risk management in order to identify and bring forward best practices in this field while further developing a network of global and regional agencies;

(c)   Develop best practice on applying integrated risk management within a single window system;

(d)   Develop guidance on a risk-based approach to the market surveillance of goods traded online;

(e)   Develop guidance on risk management tools for evaluating the level of risk of products that cannot be assessed by standard conformity assessment methods (such as products with embedded advanced technologies) and their associated residual risk.

C.   Regulatory cooperation

14.   Products placed on markets need to comply with the regulatory requirements in domestic and export markets. Consistent with the requirements of the WTO-administered multilateral trading system, technical regulations should be developed with the aim of addressing health, safety and environmental concerns without posing unnecessary barriers to trade. Businesses need to study, understand and comply with such regulatory requirements by implementing standards referenced in national technical regulations. Harmonizing these requirements across borders based on internationally agreed standards can facilitate this process and contribute to common principles for enforcement of product safety, security and market surveillance. This is supported by the *Recommendation L on International Model for Transnational Regulatory Cooperation Based on Good Regulatory Practice* and is the main objective of the Ad Hoc Team of Specialists on Standardization and Regulatory Techniques (START).

15.   In the area of regulatory cooperation, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)   Continue to build awareness on standards, standardization and education in support of *Recommendation I on Education on Standards-Related Issues;*

(b)   Finalize the common regulatory arrangement (CRA) for trunk pipeline safety in relation to hydrogen;

(c)   Explore and develop new themes that could benefit from a CRA based on *Recommendation L* and further develop examples for the annexes of existing CRAs;

(d)   Explore further guidance on continuous compliance of products with embedded digital technologies related to quality infrastructure (i.e. standardization, metrology, international regulatory cooperation, market surveillance, risk management).

D.   Gender-responsive standardization

16.   The lack of gender-responsive standards and awareness of their importance has resulted in unnecessary health and safety risks for women and girls and led to standards having unequal impacts. As standards-setting bodies progressively develop policies for mainstreaming gender in their activities and in the management of their organizations, there is an evolving need for further guidance and implementation tools. In 2016, WP.6 launched the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative and in 2022 the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (ToS-GRS) was approved by the ECE Executive Committee. This is an important contribution to SDG 5, "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". This has resulted in the publication in 2018 of the *Recommendation U on Gender-Responsive Standards* and the *Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development* which has to date eighty-two signatories.

17.   In the area of gender-responsive standardization, WP.6 plans to conduct the following activities:

(a)   Enhance the implementation of *Recommendation U* and encourage national standards bodies and relevant standards developers to sign the *Declaration* and to report on impact;

(b)   Develop a model best practice for a gender action plan for a standards development body;

(c)   Enhance research on and eventually develop a recommendation on mainstreaming gender throughout the quality infrastructure;

(d)   Continue exchanges of experience in the area of gender-responsive standards in order to identify and bring forward best practices in this field while further developing the network of global and regional standards development bodies;

(e)   Explore further areas that GRS could add guidance, notably in mainstreaming gender throughout the quality infrastructure.

IV.   External factors

18.   The Regulatory Cooperation Unit is expected to implement these activities on the assumption that: (a) there is political will and cooperation among Governments, standards bodies and other key quality infrastructure bodies; (b) there is demand for ECE standards and recommendations; (c) member States provide the necessary information and support; (d) there is active participation by experts in ECE technical meetings; and (e) donor support for the work of the subprogramme is adequate.

V.   Additional resources being sought

19.   If additional resources can be secured, WP.6 will

(a)   Conduct a follow-up project to the Standards for SDG/gender-responsive standards project;

(b)   Maintain and further develop the LearnQI e-learning portal;[2]

(c)   Respond to requests for capacity-building by member States;

(d)   Support the implementation of WP.6 recommendations by member States, as appropriate.

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[2] See: https://learnqi.unece.org/

Annex

Deliverables to be implemented in 2025

1. The mandates of WP.6 and its subgroups provide the legislative framework for its deliverables. The table below lists all deliverables, by category and subcategory, for the year 2025 that are expected to contribute to the attainment of the objective of WP.6 stated above. This table is an excerpt from the *Proposed programme budget for 2024* (A/79/6 (Sect. 20)/Part A).

Deliverables	*2025*
	planned
Quantified deliverables	
A. Facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies	
Parliamentary documentation (number of documents)	
2. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies	14
Substantive services for meetings (number of three-hour meetings)	
6. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, its Bureau and related expert bodies	13
B. Generation and transfer of knowledge	
Field and technical cooperation projects (number of projects)	
9. On enhancing usage and uptake of standards for sustainable development, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls	1
Seminars, workshops and training events (number of days)	
13. Workshops for policymakers and experts in low- and middle-income countries in the ECE region on trade procedures, supply chain management, conformity assessment and market surveillance, and women's entrepreneurship	6
Publications (number of publications)	
17. On trade standard guidance in the following areas: quality infrastructure, risk management, education, sustainable development	2
18. On mainstreaming a gender perspective into standards	1
Technical materials (number of materials)	
24. Training material and guidelines on trade standards and/or regulatory cooperation	2
Fact-finding, monitoring and investigating missions (number of missions)	
27. Fact-finding missions on […] regulatory cooperation and standardization and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade	1

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