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Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards

Report of activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender- Responsive Standards 2023–2024

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 since the report provided to the thirty-third session of WP.6, for the period 2023–2024.

Mandate

At its thirty-third session, WP.6 mandated the secretariat and the ToS-GRS to continue to report on activities at the next session (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2023/2, paragraph 34, decision 11).

Proposed decision

“Member States adopted the *Report of activities of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards 2023–2024* (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2024/6). They encouraged all member States to engage in dialogue with standards development bodies in their jurisdiction to become signatories of the *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 questionnaire for this. They also requested that the secretariat prioritize regrouping and relabelling all materials available on the website from previous events into a single resource centre. They further requested the Team of Specialists and its secretariat to continue its awareness-raising efforts and to report on an annual basis on these activities.”

* This document is submitted under the responsibility of the subgroup Chair. This document has not been edited by a professional editor.



I. Introduction

1. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) launched the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) in 2016 with an aim to help support the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (Sustainable Development Goal [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* (hereafter *ECE Declaration*) and suggested elements for standards-related gender action plans. It has also led to the creation of the Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (ToS-GRS), approved by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Executive Committee on 30 September 2022 (ECE/EX/2022/L.13, 5d).

2. This report spans the period from July 2023 to May 2024. At its second annual meeting on 3 and 4 April 2024,¹ the membership of the ToS-GRS confirmed the continuation of appointment of Michelle Parkouda of Canada as Chair, Stephanie Eynon of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as Vice Chair and Lucy Salt of New Zealand as Vice Chair.

II. Report on progress of activities 2023–2024

3. The ToS-GRS had three working meetings during this reporting period on 5 July 2023 (34 participants total/23 women), on 29 November 2023 (38 participants total/28 women), on 7 February 2024 (60 participants total/38 women). It had a conference on 27 September 2023 on “Standards and circular economy: incorporating a gender perspective in standards for sustainability” (79 participants total/57 women). It had its second annual meeting on 3 and 4 April 2024 as a hybrid meeting (90 participants total/55 women).

4. The ToS-GRS has made good progress on the activities which were defined in the WP.6 Programme of work (PoW) for 2024 (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2023/14).

- In support of paragraph 16(a), the ToS-GRS continually encourages national standards bodies and relevant standards developers to sign the *ECE Declaration* (see below in the implementation section the update on new signatories).
- In support of paragraph 16(b), the ToS-GRS further sought responses to the template questionnaire it had developed in the previous period. Submissions were received during this period from Canada and the International Standardization Organization (ISO) (adding to the six submissions received in the previous period). 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 the code lists on sex, gender and salutations aiming to integrate this information in electronic data communication and thus enlarging the potential user audience of these principles.
- In support of paragraph 16(d), the LearnQI e-learning module on gender-responsive standards was translated and published on the website in the following languages: French, Russian, Arabic and Chinese.
- In support of paragraph 16(e), the ToS-GRS has held regular meetings to discuss best practices, knowledge sharing and methodology. In general, the regular working meetings featured a key speaker on a related topic whose main points are featured below in the section “pertinence of the topic”. The full meeting reports and agendas are available on the individual meeting pages.²

¹ See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/387566> and <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/387904>.

² See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/375759>; <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/385065>; and <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/387594>.

III. Impact and implementation

A. Return on experiences

5. The ToS-GRS regularly encourages the sharing of best practices and return on experiences. To this end, it featured returns on experience during its second annual meeting on 3 and 4 April 2023. Some of the highlights on return on experiences and best practices follow.

6. The representative from the Standards Council of Canada (SCC) provided an update on the progression of gender-responsive standards in Canada. The SCC adopted a *Gender and Standardization Strategy*³ which seeks to improve gender representation, build gender expertise into the standardization system and contribute to sound research. Participation of women in international standards development is progressing, but as there are more overall participants, the percentage of women has only increased marginally. Even in areas where women represent a majority of the workforce, they are not the majority in the related standardization committees (e.g., commercial services, business administrations or healthcare). Certain areas such as environment, metallurgy/mining or civil engineering see a greater proportion of women in technical committees than in the actual workforce in these areas. Research from SCC does demonstrate the positive link between the gender composition of technical committees and improved performance of those committees.

7. The representative from the Spanish Association for Standardization (UNE) underlined that UNE is firmly committed to gender equality in alignment with its *Strategy 2025*⁴ as demonstrated by its ratification of the *ECE Declaration*. In 2022 UNE developed its gender action plan (2022–2026) with specific actions on training, recruitment, work balance and promotion among others. With the women of UNE’s management board, a forum called Mujeres En la Normalización (MEN; “women in standardization”) was established for strategic thinking on how to boost participation and contributions of women in standards. UNE is working on specific projects (ISO/FDIS 53800) but is also actively participating at an institutional level in different European (European Committee for Standardization/European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization [CEN/CENELEC] Informal Coordination Group on Gender Diversity & Inclusion) and international (ECE WP.6 ToS-GRS and the International Organization for Standardization [ISO]/International Electrotechnical Commission [IEC] Gender Focal Point Network) forums with the aim of exchanging experiences, replicating good practices and improving processes. UNE cooperates with other standards bodies from Latin America to harmonize the translations into Spanish of key ISO standards concerning gender equality such as ISO 53800 *Guidelines for promotion and implementation of gender equality and women’s empowerment*⁵ or IWA 34 *Women Entrepreneurship*.⁶ This harmonization of Spanish versions among all 17 Spanish-speaking countries will surely boost its adoption and implementation. Gender has an impact on many situations and UNE believes standards can serve as a lever for a paradigm shift, by taking into account all realities and promoting diversity and inclusion. UNE has its share of responsibility by promoting standards that integrate a gender perspective, thus contributing to the fulfilment of SDG 5.

8. The representative from the Italian National Standards Body (UNI) showcased the UNI/prassi di riferimento (PdR) 125:2022 *Certification on Gender Equality*⁷ which aims to tackle the reduction of the gender gap by addressing areas that are still critical for society. This technical document defines key indicators and essential requirements of the gender equality management system. This standard was developed in collaboration with the Ministry for Equal Opportunities and with the involvement of associations representing different stakeholders, including the civil society actors. It is now the official document on the basis

³ See: <https://www.scc.ca/en/flagships/gender>

⁴ See: <https://www.en.une.org/la-asociacion/sala-de-informacion-une/noticias/estrategia-2025-une-es-reconocida-como-una-organizacion-ejemplar-en-su-ecosistema>

⁵ See: <https://www.iso.org/standard/84591.html>

⁶ See: <https://www.iso.org/standard/79585.html>

⁷ See: <https://certificazione.pariopportunita.gov.it/public/info>

of which gender equality certification is carried out, in line with the “Gender Equality National Decree – Parameters for Certification to Enterprises”. The document aims to initiate a systemic process of cultural change within organizations to overcome a gender gap. It provides measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) and a gender equality management system. It is applicable to any organization: public, private, large or small. Based on this document, UNI has developed and adopted a diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities strategic plan which includes the adoption of UNI/PdR 125.

9. The representative of the Georgian National Agency for Standards and Metrology (GEOSTM) reminded that over the past decades, Georgia has taken important steps towards the implementation of policy measures to ensure gender equality and the empowerment of women, demonstrating its commitment to the United Nations SDGs – including SDG 5 – by declaring in 2017 all seventeen SDGs as national priorities. Georgia acknowledges the importance of inclusiveness and diversity within the standardization system and the need for the development of standards that equally benefit everyone regardless of their gender. In order to contribute to this objective, in 2020 GEOSTM signed the *ECE Declaration*, as well as elaborated its National Standardization Strategy (NSS) in cooperation with ISO experts, which defines standards and standards projects based on economic and non-economic assessment of sectorial needs, including standards under all SDGs. There is currently not a gender action plan for GEOSTM, but the agency puts special emphasis on the gender-related aspects; in particular, the agency operates on the basis of gender parity of its employees and fosters the involvement of women technical experts in the work of the technical committees. GEOSTM is a legal entity of public law with a total of 70 employees (39 female and 31 male) and its standards department coordinates nine standardization technical committees. GEOSTM has already started communication with the other national quality infrastructure bodies to plan the next steps to reflect the gender mainstreaming of standards throughout quality infrastructure services.

10. The representative of the Albanian General Directorate of Standardization (DPS) reminded the context of standardization in Albania, that DPS is the only recognized national standards body and in the spirit of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement and European Commission (EC) Regulation 1025/2012, all stakeholders from the public and private sectors are engaged in standards development. DPS is a small structure of fifteen employees and has a managing board of eleven members (seven of which are women) and a technical board of thirteen members (four of which are women). Efforts are actively being made to ensure the points of view and needs of women are heard, especially in the technical work. Being a small entity, DPS is looking forward to assistance to enhance its efforts on gender mainstreaming.

11. The Gender Focal Point for Standards Australia (SA) provided an update on the *SA Diversity Action Plan*. Gender is a priority within the action plan, but the “diversity” also allows to also focus on age, country of birth, ethnicity, education level, and employment status. SA has set up a “next-gen” programme to enable the next generation of standards developers to engage, as well as other organizations such as Vision Australia to ensure standards are available to those who have vision loss. Diversity and inclusion is a common topic within Australia, which facilitates the dissemination of this work. The *SA Diversity Action Plan* has three strategic pillars: transparency, representation and participation. Several focus area pillars were enacted in 2023 and early 2024 including defining diversity, collecting data, analysing gaps and raising awareness. Strategizing on how to best make an impact for the end-users was one of the challenges and will be a core focus in the near future.

12. The Chief of Staff of Certification Services of the National Agency of Standards Metrology and Quality Control of Benin underlined some of the key activities the Agency has taken since become a signatory of the *ECE Declaration* three years ago. Traditionally in Benin and in many areas of life, women have not been encouraged to take the lead; the Agency has therefore been working on a major mind-shift within society. It has focused on three major aspects: women in technology, safety/security/sustainability and rural life. Through these three themes, the Agency, with the help of the Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie (RNF) has helped encourage over a hundred women to take a lead position. However, there have been challenges, such as convincing the board members of the Agency of the importance of the topic; they are often looking for quick wins and not as interested in

longer-term transformations. Other priorities such as capacity building of the working class must be brought on board as well.

13. The gender focal point to ToS-GRS from the Agency for Standards and Quality (ANOR), Cameroon highlighted the efforts made by top management in favour of women, including improved representativity in the workforce (50% of ANOR employees), appointment to decision-making positions, creation of a mirror committee on gender equality and women's empowerment and the establishment of the "Women, Youth and Standardization" project enabling women and youth businesses to integrate standards in their activities. This latter project aims to inform, train and support women and young entrepreneurs in the implementation of standardization and the quality approach. The results achieved in terms of the number of people reached by the project up to 2023 include the following: 2,092 women and young entrepreneurs made aware of the project (including 150 during webinars); 647 women and young people trained; 15,264 subscribers to its Facebook page and 765 registered on its microsite; several women integrated into the technical committees and mirror committees of ANOR; and several "needs for standards" collected from this target group. A study in 2022 has helped to refine these actions in order to achieve the desired impact results. She ended by emphasizing that expectations remain for cross-functional synergies to be developed to intensify and diversify these field actions.

14. 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

15. During this reporting period, there were three new signatories to the *ECE Declaration*: the Kyrgyzstan Center for Standardization and Metrology August 2023, the Salvadoran Organization for Standardization October 2023, and the Lesotho Standards Institution November 2023. This brings the total number of signatories up to 86. The full list is available on the dedicated webpage.⁸ Other implementations are described above in the return on experiences section.

C. Relation with other organizations' work

16. The ToS-GRS work has been presented in multiple meetings by the leadership and the secretariat including when speaking under different roles. Specific presentations of the work under the ECE banner have been made in multiple fora, including:

- Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT) Exchange Workshop on gender inclusion and standardization on 24 August 2023
- the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Empowerment programme webinars on 31 August 2023
- WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (IWG) on 22 September 2023
- World Forum of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) training programme on 14 August 2023, 15 January, 23 January, 31 January, 21 February, 11 March, and 29 April 2024

IV. Pertinence of the topic today

17. At the 29 November 2023 working meeting of the ToS-GRS, an expert on gender bias in the credit market presented her methodology to raise awareness and build buy in for a gender-responsive approach in financial institutes. She works principally in the financial

⁸ See: <https://unece.org/trade/wp6/Gender-Resp%20-Stdards-declaration>

industry in developing/transitional economies, dealing primarily with men at the executive level. She underlined that by making financial markets women-friendly, they become everybody-friendly. She stressed that positive stories can help to attract new supporters of gender-mainstreaming and that identifying low-hanging fruit is important so that they can feel that things are progressing. The full report and further details on her methodology are available in the 29 November 2023 meeting report.⁹

18. The European Commission Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) presented at the ToS-GRS working meeting of 7 February 2024 the *EU 2024 Study on the inclusiveness of anthropometrics in European harmonised standards*. This study screened about 4000 standards supporting twenty-two pieces of legislation, testing against six dimensions (including anthropomorphic coverage, statistical inclusiveness, data transparency and data representativeness). The results of the study demonstrated that around 79 per cent of all the standards tested used all the relevant characteristics of the body, 73 per cent at least partially used the correct statistical units. However, on data transparency, only 56 per cent partially referenced their data source(s) and 36 per cent did not at all. Where the underlying data was referenced, it became apparent that 76 per cent of the analytic data was not representative for the population. This inclusiveness issue can result in death, illness and most often injuries for those morphologies not being considered. The full report and further details on this study are available in the 7 February 2024 meeting report.¹⁰

19. As other transversal topics gain momentum (e.g., sustainability, digitalization, disaster recovery), it is important to ensure that gender remains at the forefront of the debate. To demonstrate this importance, the ToS-GRS organized a webinar on 27 September 2023 on “Standards and circular economy: Incorporating a gender perspective in standards for sustainability.” This conference approached this theme from several points of view: political, regulatory, industrial and academic. This underlined that taking into account women’s needs and perspectives is crucial in order to not neglect half of the population and proposed several reflections that could be picked up at subsequent meetings. The presentations and report are available on the event webpage.¹¹

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 further develop communication materials, targeting leadership (widest possible sense: presidents and board members of standards development organizations) and bringing forward the development of excellence. It was suggested to work on an FAQ on the topic (one to two pages with the preliminary questions people might have on the topic, with brief responses, heavy on examples); it was suggested that this could be a good on-line tool.

21. The ToS-GRS also underlined the importance of having documentation in Spanish, when possible, as well as the other official languages of the United Nations and other languages. The experts expressed interest in assisting with unofficial translations.

22. The ToS-GRS requested that the WP.6 secretariat prioritize regrouping and relabelling all materials available on the website from previous events into a single resource centre; for example, the April 2022 workshop¹² is not easily findable and the materials on this page are very useful. Such a resource centre could also provide some details on what material is available from other organizations (UN Women, ISO, IEC, CEN/CENELEC, etc.).

⁹ See: <https://unece.org/trade/documents/2023/12/reports/report-meeting>

¹⁰ See: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/GRS_ToS_call_minutes.pdf

¹¹ See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/375760>

¹² See: <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6-Meetings/events/366923>