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Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards**Guide for standards-related gender action plans****Submitted by the secretariat****Summary*

This guide provides a first draft of considerations for standards-related gender action plans (GAP). It is intended to be a starting point for discussion within the Team of Specialists of Gender-Responsive Standards (ToS-GRS). It is expected that this initial guide will be further developed to become a more detailed guide to help bodies to develop their gender actions and GAP.

Mandate:

The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) Programme of work for 2024 foresees “Develop a model best practice for a gender action plan for a standards development body” (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2023/14, paragraph 16.b).

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

1. Gender equality and the empowerment of women is a central objective of the United Nations, as reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 5. Gender inequalities are still deep-rooted in every society. Women suffer from lack of access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. They are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.¹ Taking into account the needs of women can help to increase women's welfare and their economic outcomes.²

2. The 2018 *Recommendation U on Gender-Responsive Standards* of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) includes a declaration which has been signed by 86 standards development bodies. Developing a gender action plan (GAP) is an integral part of the engagements which signatories adhere to in the declaration.

3. A GAP is a group of actions that a body or a government has laid down to articulate a change strategy for gender mainstreaming. This should normally include programmatic and institutional priorities as well as concrete actions which can be measured. An action plan should be structured and aim at turning a goal (gender mainstreaming) into reality.

4. The 2018 *Recommendation U* includes groups of actions which signatories could integrate into their GAP (see annex). These are articulated around three themes: gender balance (representativity), gender-responsive standards (resulting standards) and gender-responsive standards bodies (internal transformation).

5. This type of action plan will be unique to each body and depends on the objectives, the current level of gender awareness, political engagement and other internal or national factors. It is to be expected that GAPs may be very different from each other. WP.6 has developed a survey on GAPs and their implementation, seeking to better understand actual implementations and eventually develop a guidance document on the topic. Thirteen national standards bodies, two regional standards body and two international organization responded. Two main aspects of a GAP are analysed below from these responses: the objective and the actions. The latter is compared to the groups of actions proposed in *Recommendation U* (reproduced in annex). All bodies that have developed a GAP are moving in a positive direction towards gender-mainstreaming and should be congratulated. The below analysis does not put into question their relevance.

I. Objective of an action plan

6. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) published in 2015 a *Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap (NTF Roadmap)*.³ Though the objective of this guide was developed with trade facilitation reform in mind, the steps of a roadmap can be relevant to any action plan or drafting any regulatory reform. There are roughly four parts, each of which are described in more detail within the *NTF Roadmap* publication:

- The rationale (why is the reform necessary, where do we stand and where do we want to go)
- The strategy (what do we want to do and how we will do it)
- The implementation (who will do what, when and how much will it cost)
- The conditions (what are the risks and assumptions that need to be considered)

7. The first element in such a roadmap is the vision statement which should summarize the objectives and the expected benefits. It should provide the direction and also serve as a source of inspiration and motivation. The main target audience for such a statement are high-level deciders and the statement should be formulated in a clear, concise way – focusing on what and when, not necessarily how. It should display the benefits to be achieved in

¹ See: <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>

² See: “Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Gender Equality”, WTO & World Bank, 2020, https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/women_trade_pub2807_e.htm

³ See: <https://unece.org/trade/guide-drafting-NTF-roadmap>

quantifiable form (using figures) and timelines by which they should be achieved (dates) Ideally, it should be a single phrase.

8. A GAP could be inspired by this same approach. Unfortunately, none of the GAP examples provided through the WP.6 survey have taken this approach. They all provide a list of desired goals which are not very different from the list of activities, both responding to the second part of the *NTF Roadmap*, “strategy”; what they want to do and how this will be done. None of the objectives informed in the survey provide timelines. The responses read like a technical guide rather than a strategic guide, which may seem reasonable given the types of organizations that are responding (standards development bodies). This analysis is based on the information provided through the survey and some of the respondents may have a vision statement in their GAP.

9. There could be benefit in adding a vision statement at the outset. Even in economies with existing gender policies, it would be helpful to specify how the GAP fits into the country’s overall approach. And in economies that are less receptive to gender mainstreaming, such a vision statement can assist in explaining why reform is necessary and the intended outcome.

10. Furthermore, a vision statement should help to motivate those who have to implement it. Going directly into a list of actions like data collection, balanced representation, gender-responsive deliverables... do describe the what, but don’t explain the why. Why are we doing these actions? What do we expect to achieve? When do we expect to see some results? It can be more motivating to know that we have a goal with a deadline.

11. What could such vision statements look like? Here are some abstract examples; it is understood that these or other statements would need to be adapted to the objectives of the body and the economy.

(a) By [date], gender-mainstreaming policies of standards development body in [country] will result in [main objective].

(b) By [date], standards development body in [country] will rank among top 10 in the world in [performance indicator].

(c) By [date], standards development body in [country] will implement all provisions included in [national policy or international standard such as the WP.6 *Recommendation U*].

12. Such a vision statement provides a direction and momentum. For the high-level deciders, it provides a clear idea of what is to be expected of the GAP. For the implementers (staff or experts), it provides a motivation to attain the stated goal within the defined timeframe. Existing GAPs and future GAPs are encouraged to consider the addition of such a vision statement.

II. Activities of an action plan

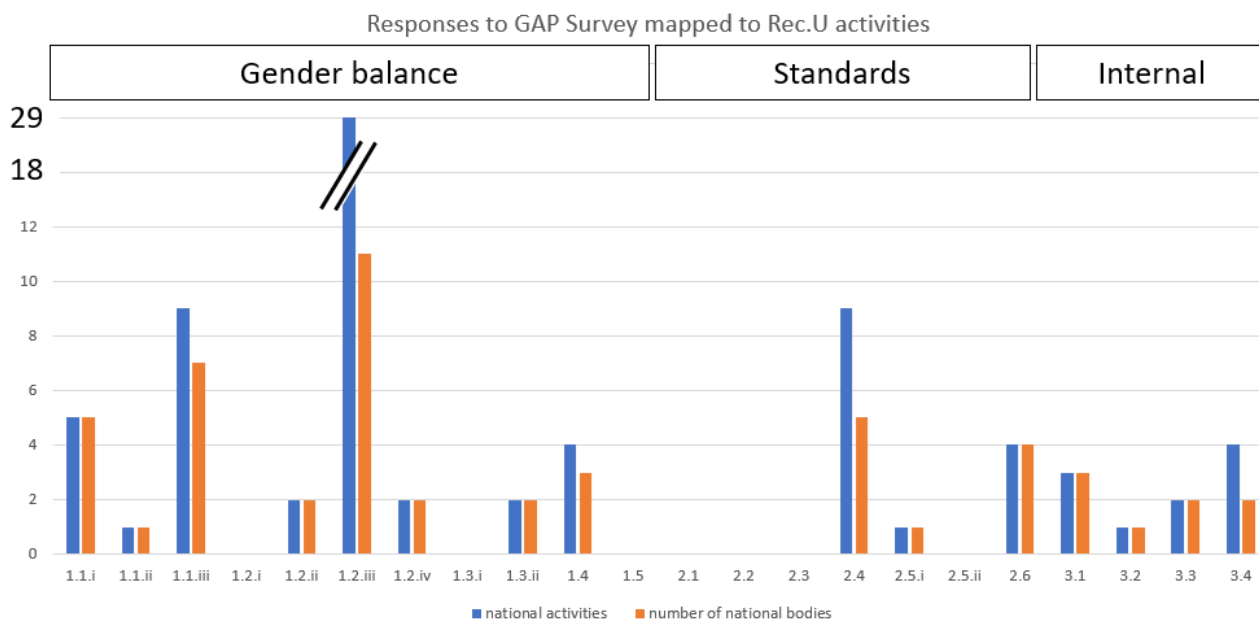
13. A roadmap often foresees the activities to be elaborated in two steps. First a goal which defines the future outcome that needs to be achieved and which contributes to the achievement of the vision statement. Second, activities which define how the goals will be achieved. The goals should be “SMART” (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound). The activities are specific actions or projects that will allow to reach the stated goal, using active verbs.

14. Activities exist in all of the GAPs informed to the WP.6 survey. The survey was not presented in such a way which would have allowed formulating goals and actions. In some GAPs, instead of the term “goal”, the term “outcome” is used. For example, in the ISO 2024-2025 GAP, “Outcome 2: Balanced representation and participation” and this is followed by an activity with an active verb: “Barriers to women’s participation in technical work are alleviated”.⁴

⁴ See: <https://www.iso.org/strategy2030/key-areas-of-work/diversity-and-inclusion.html>

15. The WP.6 *Recommendation U* established a list of 22 activities that could be considered in a GAP (reproduced in annex). Very few of these were stated verbatim in the survey submissions; however, their aim can be regrouped under each of the *Recommendation U* proposals. Doing a descriptive statistical analysis of the responses, we can see the following:

Responses to the GAP Survey compared to activities in Recommendation U



- The activity 1.2.iii, “Strive to create a standards development environment which enables gender inclusivity and equality; develop and implement policies, procedures and activities which support gender inclusivity (e.g. raising awareness; training for committee chairs, programme managers, members; distributing this declaration to all those involved in standards development, etc.)” is by far the activity which is the most cited. Twenty-nine of the national activities of 11 of the national standards bodies relate to this.
- The activity 1.1.iii, “Strive for a representative number of women in all phases of standards development; collect sex-disaggregated data on participants in standards development (overall and by industry) and compare this with employment statistics (e.g. develop a graph indicating the gender balance on committees and update it annually, and if possible, aggregate it by industry sectors)” has 9 national activities of 7 different national standards bodies which relate to this.
- The activity 2.4, “Creating gender responsive standards; use existing frameworks (e.g. the International Organization for Standardization, European Committee for Standardization, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization, regional standards organizations etc.) to work collaboratively and share resources/expertise” has 9 national activities of 5 national standards bodies which relate to this.
- Five of the *Recommendation U* activities are taken up by 3 to 5 national standards bodies.
- Eight of the *Recommendation U* activities are taken up by 1 or 2 national standards bodies.
- Seven of the *Recommendation U* activities are not taken up by any of the national standards bodies.

16. Of the three groups of activities, most activities concern the representativity and gender balance. None of the national activities reported relate to 4 of the 7 activities on gender-responsive standards. Very few responses refer to activities on internal processes.

17. Though there are a lot of responses on representativity, most of these concern segregated data and policies/procedures which support gender inclusivity. These two activities seem to be the main objective of most GAP.

18. None of the activities informed in the survey were formulated as a SMART goal, some were short responses like “communications guideline”, “reporting on diversity”, “awareness raising.” This is probably because of the format of the survey. Some of the responses could be placed under multiple activities of *Recommendation U* (awareness raising could be 1.2.iii or 2.5.i depending on the target audience).

19. Present and future GAPs might benefit from a structured formulation of activities. There would be benefit to linking these to an overarching vision and targeting specific objectives. They might also consider grouping some of their existing activities into the headings of those contained in *Recommendation U*. Currently, nearly all responses can fit under the existing headings. Three national bodies provided multiple national activities that could all be grouped under 1.2.iii. If the activities in *Recommendation U* seem too restrictive or inappropriate, experts are advised to raise this issue within the WP.6 Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards (ToS-GRS) in order to improve the guidance.

20. This analysis should not be misconstrued to discourage further reforms. All actions which work towards gender equality are positive and the respondents should be congratulated for their work in this regard. This document is trying to identify how other bodies can learn from this experience and eventually how GAPs might be improved and harmonized.

Annex

Actions that standards bodies can include in their gender action plan¹

Group of actions 1: Working towards gender balanced/representative and inclusive standards development environments:

1.1 Strive for a representative number of women in all phases of standards development:

(i) assess the gender balance of our committees and determine if there is an opportunity to improve;

(ii) connect with organizations and informal networks within industries and professions to improve the gender balance of our technical committees;

(iii) collect sex-disaggregated data on participants in standards development (overall and by industry) and compare this with employment statistics (e.g. develop a graph indicating the gender balance on committees and update it annually, and if possible, aggregate it by industry sectors).

1.2 Strive to create a standards development environment which enables gender inclusivity and equality:

(i) ensure the leadership supports striving for a gender inclusive environment and for gender responsive standards;

(ii) conduct yearly research with committee members to learn about any differences in experiences in standards development based on gender;

(iii) develop and implement policies, procedures and activities which support gender inclusivity (e.g. raising awareness; training for committee chairs, programme managers, members; distributing this declaration to all those involved in standards development, etc.);

(iv) review the gender balance of the chairs/senior roles within standards making and seek to improve it where it is imbalanced.

1.3 Support individuals who want to be gender advocates by encouraging and enabling them to act within their areas of standards development:

(i) encourage programme/project managers and chairs to promote gender inclusivity on their standards development committees and provide them with tools and resources to do so;

(ii) share (within and between organizations) information/data/experiences about internal or external gender inclusivity projects to identify and share best practice.

1.4 Strive for gender representative participation in other phases of the standards development process including making proposals, commenting on proposals and commenting on drafts.

1.5 Ensure organizational and individual gender actions plans include relevant objectives so that progress can be monitored and measured.

Group of actions 2: Creating gender responsive standards

2.1 Strive to develop a network of gender experts to provide a resource to support standards development committees in their work:

2.2 Contribute to the development of a tool(s) suitable for conducting gender-based analysis of all standards in any form of active development (new or revision) to ensure

¹ See: https://unece.org/DAM/trade/wp6/Recommendations/Rec_U_en.pdf

standards are gender responsive in their content and implementation. This tool could be based on Gender-Based Analysis Plus developed by Status of Women Canada, or other methods.

2.3 Provide training for any new tools which may be developed and ensure you are measuring the participation in and impact of this training.

2.4 Use existing frameworks (e.g. the International Organization for Standardization, European Committee for Standardization, European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization, regional standards organizations etc.) to work collaboratively and share resources/expertise.

2.5 Ensure committees have relevant expertise, tools and resources to strive to develop gender responsive standards:

(i) provide committees with any necessary training to develop their gender expertise;

(ii) ensure committees include a gender expert or have access to gender expertise (e.g. via a network of gender experts).

2.6 Strive to institutionalize successful and effective practices, procedures and policies to ensure the future/sustainability of gender responsive standards development.

Group of actions 3: Creating gender responsive standards bodies

3.1 Assess existing and develop/obtain as required the skills and expertise needed to create and implement a gender action plan.

3.2 Collect data on the gender ratio of employees at all different levels.

3.3 Develop training tools to enhance the gender awareness of employees.

3.4 Monitor and record the participation in and impact of any training provided.
