



Economic Commission for Europe**Executive Committee****Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business****Thirtieth session**

Geneva, 11 and 12 July 2024

**Report of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation
and Electronic Business on its thirtieth session****I. Attendance**

1. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) held its thirtieth Plenary on 11 and 12 July 2024. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Sue Probert (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Chairperson of UN/CEFACT.
2. The following countries were represented: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Croatia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, Morocco, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of the Congo, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, Switzerland, Tajikistan, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ukraine, the United States and Uzbekistan.
3. Representatives of the European Commission also participated.
4. The following intergovernmental international organizations participated in the meeting: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP); the International Trade Centre (ITC); UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD); UN Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL); UN Environment Programme (UNEP); the World Bank Group (WBG); the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Environment, Sustainable Transport, and Sustainable Energy Divisions also participated.
5. The following non-governmental, observer and partner organizations participated in the meeting: the Asia Pacific Council for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (AFACT), the Chilean Business Women Association, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Global Standards 1 (GS1), the Greater Caspian Association, the Guichet Unique des Opérations Transfrontalières (GUOT), the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the Pan European Forest Certification Council, the Port of Rotterdam, and the World Economic Forum (WEF).
6. The UN/CEFACT Chair opened the session, summarizing the results of a successful Forum, held prior to the Plenary on 8-10 July 2024, and expressed her appreciation for the

high in-person participation. She noted the completion of her second mandate as Chair and the importance of the upcoming Chair election for the next term during this Plenary. She stressed the importance of maintaining UN/CEFACT standards and urged United Nations Member States to mobilize more resources (including extrabudgetary funding) to assist the ECE secretariat in this work and to secure additional volunteer experts.

7. The Officer-in-Charge of the ECE welcomed delegates to the Plenary and highlighted the increasing relevance of UN/CEFACT activities in advancing international trade and e-business and in supporting emerging and transitioning economies in harnessing their full potential. She stressed the valuable contribution that UN/CEFACT deliverables are making to emerging and cutting-edge issues such as reducing the carbon footprint of cross-border trade operations, enhancing the transparency and sustainability of supply chains and improving multimodal connectivity along trade and transport corridors. She noted how UN/CEFACT activities align with the ECE strategic priorities focusing on the green and digital transformations, the circular economy for sustainable development and the climate action. She concluded by congratulating the outgoing Chair and expressing appreciation for her dedication and contribution to the work of UN/CEFACT over the past six years.

8. The Head of the Permanent Mission of Canada in Geneva delivered her welcome remarks. She expressed her appreciation for the breadth of UN/CEFACT expertise and its engagement in addressing pressing challenges globally. She emphasized the need for coordinated efforts to develop solutions for ongoing trade challenges, particularly in supporting digitalization and the green transition. She welcomed the UN/CEFACT deliverables, highlighting their role in supporting the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). In conclusion, she welcomed the nomination of Ms. Nancy Norris from Canada, who has been serving as a UN/CEFACT Vice-Chair, for the position of Chair.

II. Adoption of the agenda (item 1)

9. The Chair presented the annotated provisional agenda, including the following amendments:

- Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/INF.4 under agenda item 5 to be presented for information instead of for decision;
- Documents ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/INF.5 and ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/INF.6 under agenda item 6(a) to be removed pending finalization by the project leads; and
- The title of the document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/INF.8 under agenda item 6(a) to be updated to “Gaps in Aligning Digitization with Transit Procedures”.

Decision 24-01

The Plenary adopted the agenda for its thirtieth session (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2024/1), including the proposed amendments.

III. Elections (item 2)

10. The UN/CEFACT Chair announced the election of a new Chair and introduced the proposal to hold the next re-election of the entire UN/CEFACT Bureau (Chair and Vice-Chairs) in 2026 with the objective of aligning the terms of the Chair and Vice-Chairs.

11. The ECE secretariat had received a nomination from Canada. The Chair invited the delegate of Canada to present the candidature, which was proposed for election by acclamation.

12. The delegate of Canada presented the candidature of Ms. Nancy Norris, who has been serving as UN/CEFACT Vice-Chair and expressed confidence that their proposed candidate would successfully lead the work of the UN/CEFACT.

13. The Plenary elected the nominated Chair by acclamation. The newly elected Chair thanked the delegations for supporting her candidacy and recognized the regional and global impact of UN/CEFACT and its work. She thanked the UN/CEFACT Bureau and the outgoing Chair for their guidance in the past years and expressed appreciation to the Mission of Canada for supporting her nomination.

14. The delegate of the Russian Federation thanked the outgoing Chair and congratulated the new Chair on her election. They noted that the proposed alignment of the Bureau members' terms and filling the vacant Vice-Chair position in the Bureau will result in a shorter term for some Bureau members. They further referred to the practices of other ECE bodies, where the terms of the Chair and Vice-Chair do not always coincide but had no objection to the proposed decision as supported by the Plenary.

15. The delegate of the United Kingdom congratulated Canada on their election for the UN/CEFACT Chair position and looked forward to working together. They expressed appreciation to the outgoing Chair for her leadership, noting the valuable lessons learned and the anticipation of continued collaboration.

Decision 24-02

To align the terms of the Chair and Vice-Chair of the UN/CEFACT Bureau, the Plenary decided that the next re-election of the entire Bureau (Chair and Vice-Chairs) will be held in 2026.

Decision 24-03

The Plenary expressed appreciation for the dedication, guidance and work of the outgoing Chair of UN/CEFACT from the United Kingdom, Ms. Sue Probert, and elected by acclamation Ms. Nancy Norris, the Chair candidate from Canada, for the period 2024-2026.

Noting a vacant position in the Bureau, resulting from the election of Vice-Chair Nancy Norris as Chair, the Plenary decided to open a call for nominations in view of its next session in 2025.

IV. Policy dialogue on the role of climate-smart connectivity and digital trade and transport corridors in support of regional and global integration and sustainable development (agenda item 3)

16. This high-level policy dialogue addressed the growing importance of climate-smart connectivity and digital trade and transport corridors for United Nations Member States, including ECE member States and programme countries. It further explored the role of international, regional and national initiatives for the digitalization of data and document exchange to improve supply chain efficiency and to reduce costs for trade actors along such corridors. The discussion emphasized the importance of UN/CEFACT tools in managing the complexities of data transfer across different modes of transport.

17. In her opening remarks, the Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) highlighted the importance of seamless connectivity across various modes of transport, and of the importance of information exchange for effective trade performance. She reiterated the role of digital connectivity for countries' integration into the global economy, including in the context of accession to the WTO, which is of relevance to several participating States of the UN Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). She recalled that in recognition of the relevance of UN/CEFACT tools for digital transformation, in November 2023 the SPECA participating States adopted the "Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor".

18. The Deputy Director-General of the WTO expressed appreciation for the partnership between the WTO and ECE in various areas, including trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade and WTO accessions. She stressed the relevance of the discussions on the role of climate-smart connectivity in the context of global challenges and disruptions of supply chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical situation. She reiterated the role of the WTO in supporting the efficient, cost-effective movement of goods across borders,

especially in the context of the WTO TFA. She elaborated on key aspects of the WTO TFA implementation, including ensuring transparency and automatization of customs procedures, reducing greenhouse emissions along value chains, and capitalizing on digital technologies for managing cross-border trade of goods.

19. The Deputy Minister of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan and Chairperson of the SPECA Working Group on Trade highlighted the importance of the WTO TFA implementation, the SPECA Trade Facilitation Strategy and the use of UN/CEFACT standards to digitalize multimodal data and document exchange. He reported on the efforts of the SPECA and ECE secretariats over the past year to support Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in their WTO accessions, including through producing trade facilitation roadmaps and studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade. He also mentioned efforts to integrate the SPECA Principles of Sustainable Trade into national plans, organize seminars on digitalization, and support pilot projects. He invited international partners to support these efforts and highlighted Tajikistan's chairmanship focus on digital and green transformations, which aligns with the ECE strategic priorities.

20. Regarding the relevance of international, regional and national initiatives and instruments, the speakers highlighted the following:

- The challenges in fully harnessing innovative technologies' potential due to varying legislation, standardization and digital maturity levels, including physical infrastructure and skills disparities;
- The need to ensure transparency and interoperability and establish "digital trust" by harmoniously implementing digital standards; and
- The importance of using UN legal instruments like the TIR Convention, the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR) and UN/CEFACT implementation standards. Such instruments and standards are crucial for trade facilitation as they provide binding requirements and supporting standards for electronic transactions and negotiable cargo documents, thus enhancing interoperability and legal certainty in international trade.

21. Regarding the way forward, the speakers suggested the following:

- Simplify and streamline the digitalization of supply chain processes (e.g. within the framework of the WTO TFA) to ensure interoperability and to address the lack of globally defined digital standards. The Plenary delegates welcomed the joint "Call to Action for Digital Trade for an interoperable and digitalized global trade ecosystem", launched by ICC and ECE at the UN/CEFACT Forum on 9 July 2024;
- Measure and assess the state of play of the digitalization of such supply chain processes. This could be done by applying the recently launched UN Trade Digitalization Index and by developing a policy recommendation and accompanying implementation instruments to support countries in enhancing digital and sustainable trade facilitation along trade and transport corridors; and
- Scale up capacity-building and cooperation at various levels to enhance climate-smart connectivity and digital trade and transport corridors to foster regional and global integration for sustainable development.

22. The delegate of Kyrgyzstan thanked the ECE secretariat for organizing the Sustainable and Digital Trade Facilitation Week, including this high-level policy dialogue. They reiterated that Kyrgyzstan, despite its landlocked position, has been advancing transport infrastructure projects like the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway under the "One Belt – One Road" initiative, enhancing regional and global trade routes. They stressed the crucial role of modernizing infrastructure and ensuring smart connectivity of data and trade flows. They concluded by recognizing the role of the SPECA Roadmap in leveraging UN instruments and standards to optimize these processes, addressing non-physical barriers and promoting seamless movement of goods in the Trans-Caspian corridor.

23. The delegate of Kazakhstan stressed the importance of climate-smart connectivity and digital trade and transport corridors for the country. They referenced the potential role of the SPECA Roadmap for the landlocked economies, which has digitalization as its core objective. They mentioned a seminar, organized by ECE in Aktau, Kazakhstan in June 2024, which focused on identifying digital transformation needs for documents and sectors of the supply chain in the Trans-Caspian and other SPECA corridors. In conclusion, they acknowledged the importance of UN/CEFACT standards and expressed appreciation for the support provided to Kazakhstan.

24. The delegate of Ukraine expressed appreciation to the panellists and encouraged stronger cooperation between the UNCITRAL and ECE secretariats.

Decision 24-04

The Plenary welcomed the policy dialogue on climate-smart connectivity and trade and transport corridors and highlighted its relevance to inclusive and resilient regional and global trade integration and sustainable development.

In response to the 70th Commission session and building on existing UN/CEFACT work supporting multimodal data exchange along supply chains, the Plenary encouraged the development of a policy recommendation and accompanying implementation instruments to support United Nations Member States in enhancing digital and sustainable trade facilitation along trade and transport corridors.

V. Matters arising since the twenty-ninth Plenary (item 4)

25. The ECE secretariat presented the *Matters Arising Since the Twenty-Ninth Plenary* report. This document outlines the secretariat's support to UN/CEFACT and summarizes normative, capacity-building, technical assistance and cooperation activities in response to emerging needs for sustainable and digital trade facilitation and for achieving the cross-sectoral strategic goals of the ECE. The UN/CEFACT secretary elaborated on the role of the UN/CEFACT standards and recommendations to offer digital solutions, promote information exchange and encourage automation.

26. The ECE regional adviser presented a report detailing the capacity-building activities and technical cooperation projects conducted as part of the secretariat's normative work. He gave examples of activities that facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practices among the ECE membership, particularly its 17 programme countries, also in the context of the accession to the WTO. Some technical assistance activities included the preparation of trade facilitation readiness assessment studies and roadmaps, which support the implementation of the WTO TFA and UN/CEFACT standards. He also highlighted the *UN/CEFACT Package of Standards for Data Exchange along the Supply Chain*, and showcased examples of several pilot projects related to digitalizing intermodal transport corridors.

27. The delegate of Ukraine expressed appreciation to the ECE secretariat for presenting an overview of its activities. They thanked the outgoing Chair and acknowledged the importance of the work on multimodal connectivity, especially in the context of ongoing geopolitical challenges, and suggested targeted training activities.

28. The delegate of the Russian Federation welcomed the activities of UN/CEFACT, including its recent fora held in Geneva and Bangkok, and expressed appreciation for the work of the secretariat. They highlighted the capacity-building activities that support the integration of ECE landlocked member States into regional and global supply chains. They further stressed the importance of ongoing UN/CEFACT collaboration with ICC, WCO, WTO and others, as well as engagement within the wider expert community.

Decision 24-05

The Plenary welcomed the report of the secretariat, *Matters Arising since the Twenty-Ninth Session* and the *Report from the Economic Commission for Europe Regional Adviser*. The Plenary acknowledged the importance of UN/CEFACT work in supporting the digital and

green transformations for climate action and sustainable development and advancing the 2030 Agenda. The Plenary requested that the secretariat and its regional adviser present a consolidated report on activities and flagship projects, focusing on impact and relevance, at the next Plenary in 2025. Furthermore, the Plenary invited potential donors to contribute additional resources to existing and new projects.

VI. Technical dialogue on global solutions for digital, sustainable and resilient value chains in support of the green and digital transformations (item 5)

29. The objective of this technical dialogue was to identify the primary challenges in achieving value chain transparency, to explore how digital product passports (DPP) and verifiable credentials can combat greenwashing, and to review feedback on the ECE *Draft Recommendation No. 49*, and to chart the way forward for this UN/CEFACT deliverable. Additionally, the dialogue examined how the ongoing work on the development of the UN Transparency Protocol (UNTP) for DPPs could enhance the interoperability of information exchange systems and the disclosure of information on sustainability parameters. Panellists from the public and private sectors highlighted some key aspects, including further development of the recommendation.

30. The representative of the ECE Energy Division stressed that some raw minerals are critical due to their limited availability, concentration in a few regions and their complex transformation process. The most complex part of this value chain is the middle, where many processes and actors are involved with little accountability. In the last five years, ECE has built the UN Resource Management System (UNRMS) to increase accountability for social, environmental and economic aspects and to promote circularity and value addition principles. The UNRMS offers an opportunity to increase transparency and consensus around minerals extraction and processing and to support the green energy transition.

31. The representative of Trafigura pointed out that significant challenges remain in meeting expectations for value chain transparency of critical raw materials (CRMs), such as failure to consider the perspective of producers and information gaps. They further noted that such transparency is currently mainly pursued through the technical ESG questionnaires requests to the industry, which is insufficient. They welcomed the development of *Draft Recommendation No. 49*, which can generate positive change and help suppliers engage with new systems, provided they rely on progressive, risk-based due diligence data. Finally, he emphasized that sustainability linked loans by banks and capital providers may be more effective in driving change.

32. The UN/CEFACT Vice-Chair shared the feedback received from regulators and the industry on *Draft Recommendation No.49: Transparency at Scale* during the public review period. The focus of the UNTP is to provide an interoperability framework and a set of guidance materials to achieve transparency at scale. The value of the framework lies in using the cross-industry dataset to create an interoperable and extensible industry passport. This framework builds on existing standards (e.g. ECE *Recommendation No. 46*, and those of UN/CEFACT, W3C, ISO and IFRS)¹, is informed by other initiatives (e.g. Global Battery Alliance) and expects to align with the joint CEN-CENELEC² standardization effort. The UN DPP is a guidance document that supports upstream data collection while the European Union (EU) DPP is a legislative requirement covering the market-entry stage. The UNTP will produce evidence and measurable impact (e.g. number of UNTP implementers by type, volume of DPPs issued, uptake by country, industry sector, ESG category, impact on SDGs) and will be presented to the UN/CEFACT Plenary in 2025. The Vice-Chair also noted that the UNTP was developed using a transparent process; the project-meeting minutes and comments log are publicly available.

¹ World Wide Web Consortium (W3C); International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

² European Committee for Standardization (CEN); European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization (CENELEC). This is otherwise known as the European Union (EU) DPP.

33. The secretariat presented a short note on the steps for finalizing the draft recommendation and its accompanying instruments. Inputs and suggestions provided at the thirtieth Plenary will be reflected in the next draft, which will be circulated for the second round of public review upon the Bureau's approval. In 2025 it will be presented to the thirty-first Plenary for adoption. The accompanying instruments mentioned in the draft recommendation, currently under development, will be tested throughout 2024 and will build on lessons learned from pilots in the agrifood, textiles and CRMs sectors.

34. The Chair of the CEN-CENELEC JTC 24 DPP System and Framework spoke about the working group established to support the implementation of the EU Ecodesign for Sustainable Product Regulation following the standardization request for the EU DPP system last year. This working group also aims to address interoperability challenges due to multiple EU regulations and directives and the need to have an EU DPP system for multiple product sectors. In 2023, the working group had flagged the importance of developing an infrastructure to exchange DPP data in global supply chains, and that a global approach on DPPs was therefore needed for a quality infrastructure. The JTC 24 Chair clarified that (i) from a global perspective, the intended use of traceability standards and DPPs will depend on existing regional legislation; and (ii) from a technology perspective, a federated interoperability approach should be followed, defining the minimum core interoperability artefacts instead of a complete system. He recommended that the role, organization and content scope of the draft recommendation embrace a more regional and federated approach to allow diverse systems to be interconnected. He recommended addressing the issues related to interoperability, technological openness, neutrality and sovereignty to foster inclusivity and prevent customers from being restricted to certain vendors and service providers. The draft recommendation should be compatible with other relevant standards. It should also support a complete and modular framework for cost purposes and ensure trust through data sovereignty.

35. The representative of GS1 emphasized the increasingly complex regulatory landscape. The private sector must fulfil legal requirements and increase efficiency and transparency. Regulators must consider how the real market operates and promote innovation, while also considering the risk of disruption. The private sector requires standards to cover key pillars of the draft recommendation: the identification of data entities, data sharing, data finding, interoperability and collaboration between stakeholders. These conditions may allow for a shift from compliance to business opportunity.

36. The UN/CEFACT Vice-Chair clarified that the draft recommendation supports the development of a vendor-neutral protocol. The UN DPP focuses on data content, quality and conformity credentials on a global scale, while the CEN-CENELEC focuses on the system for a mandatory DPP at the EU level. There is strong interest in collaboration with CEN-CENELEC, IEC and ISO to ensure compatibility of the outputs. On data security, it was clarified that UNTP data will remain where it is owned.

37. The representative of the WEF presented the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, which assists governments to implement the WTO TFA. The UNTP will be useful in supporting digitalization projects, allowing actors, including MSMEs, to exchange data through a robust traceability and transparency framework and understand the actions needed to ensure compliance. The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation welcomes collaboration and alignment with UN/CEFACT.

38. The representative of the UNEP underscored the importance of embedding sustainability and circularity within a global, system-wide perspective. It is essential to understand where environmental and social impacts exist in the textiles and minerals sectors. Governments can strengthen and harmonize policies to promote the more sustainable use of products. The UNEP Digitalization 4 Circular Economy (D4CE) Impact Initiative held consultations with different stakeholders, including SMEs, to understand the needs, opportunities and gaps in moving towards more digital solutions.

39. Regarding the way forward, the speakers suggested the following:

- To reach common goals for DPPs, cooperation and synergies will be key, considering the amount of knowledge to be aggregated. It will also be essential to identify how to

best collaborate to avoid duplication, considering the scope and the differences between the respective ongoing initiatives and projects.

- The differing ideas about the principles behind Draft Recommendation No. 49 – notably around federated and technological interoperability – will have to be addressed. It will be critical to assess the scope of the recommendation.
- A factual basis, mapping ongoing initiatives and projects, could be established to ensure cooperation in a way that supports the common goals.

40. The delegate of the United States intervened in support of the draft recommendation as originally proposed, including the timelines and approach suggested by the secretariat for its testing and finalization over the next year.

41. The delegate of Germany welcomed the initiative for a UNTP DPP, its aim to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in value chains and the approach to thinking of the DPP as an international tool, thereby contributing to a modern, digital, international, quality infrastructure. However, they expressed concern about several aspects, including the lack of clarity on the targeted deliverables and the project's scope. For example, the draft recommendation aims to create guidance for governments as well as a "detailed suite of technical specifications". The project's vast scope threatens successful implementation due to its complexity and numerous dependencies within the extensive quality infrastructure. The document mixes recommendations for data, DPP ecosystems and traceability, private and public stakeholders and various economic regions. They stated that the schedule should be more realistic, as it is very ambitious considering the fundamental questions raised about the draft. Furthermore, the fundamental question of the usefulness of such standardization activities remains open, given the various ongoing international activities and projects occurring in parallel. Duplication should be avoided. The delegate strongly supported a global standardization perspective for sustainable products and, in particular, for DPPs. But in contrast to the proposals made in *Draft Recommendation No. 49*, they believe a federated interoperability approach is required. This would lead to high-level interfaces and frameworks between different regional DPP systems. This is necessary because the notion and reasons for implementing DPPs are diverse in the different regions. The delegate welcomed the initiative of the UNTP DPP in general, expressing interest in supporting the upcoming work and dialogue leading up to the second draft of the recommendation.

42. The delegate of Italy acknowledged the work of ECE and UN/CEFACT on global solutions for digital, sustainable and resilient value chains in support of the green and digital transformations. They welcomed the work of ECE and ECLAC³ on used textiles trade and the latest publication "*Reversing direction in the used clothing crisis: Global, European and Chilean perspectives*" which outlines recommendations to improve the economic, social and environmental outcomes from the trade of used textiles.

43. The delegate of the European Union thanked the secretariat and the UN/CEFACT Bureau for the opportunity to discuss traceability and transparency through digital solutions, including DPPs. They explained that in the EU, the Ecodesign for Sustainable Product Regulation is the legal basis for the DPP, which explicitly obliges the European Commission to ensure interoperability between different approaches. The EU delegate expressed some concerns, echoing those raised by Germany regarding the draft recommendation, in particular its compatibility with the principle of technological neutrality, as it references specific names and products. The delegate called on all parties to continue discussing the text of the draft recommendation, weighing all concerns in the coming period and ensuring proper interaction with all international standardization efforts.

44. The delegate of Singapore thanked the experts' team on UNTP DPP and recognized the progress made. They congratulated UN/CEFACT on producing a draft recommendation that defines best practices for a high-integrity framework for supply chain transparency. Singapore had been issuing documents using a decentralized and interoperable approach that aligns to the draft recommendation for many years. In addition to Education Certificates, this

³ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

approach was used to implement Health Certificates during the pandemic. Such an approach could be deployed for sustainability information globally. They will closely follow the UNTP development with interest, and they welcomed further clarifications on technological neutrality to prevent vendor lock-in. The draft recommendation is also aligned to EU Cyber Resilience Act, which explicitly calls for the use of open-source software and strongly recommends its use. The delegate expressed interest in contributing their expertise in the area of trade digitalization.

45. The delegate of Kyrgyzstan expressed support for promoting interoperability between traceability and transparency systems via the open protocol defined by UNTP. They noted that such a protocol defines an open framework for cross-border and cross-industry interoperability of sustainability data that can be adopted by any solution or platform. Kyrgyzstan is proud of its high-quality products and sustainable practices and recognizes that digital and verifiable evidence will uplift the value of sustainable product exports. They recalled that the draft recommendation and associated UNTP toolkits are still in the draft stage and are presented for information. They acknowledged the accompanying briefing note and supported the proposed decision that acknowledges progress and recognizes the importance of collaboration with other standards initiatives.

46. The delegate of Uzbekistan expressed support for the draft recommendation, acknowledging the issues raised by other delegations and highlighting them as critical for the future of due diligence, green claims and anti-deforestation efforts. They noted how traceability requirements and blockchain technology can combine to facilitate credible trade practices.

47. The delegate of Ukraine expressed appreciation for the development of *Draft Recommendation No. 49* and noted some reservations about the current draft. They mentioned lack of clarity on the scope and benefits to potential users. They would also like to see a uniform approach to the terminology and solutions, as offered in ECE Recommendations No. 1 and 2.

48. The delegate of Japan raised a few questions regarding the draft recommendation. First, they asked whether the DPP is a combination of multiple IDs. They further enquired whether a passport number (to guarantee uniqueness) will be required to differentiate products. Lastly, they raised concerns about the use of location codes and the legal entities identification in DPPs, which is an important point to address.

49. The delegate of Australia highlighted the importance of developing innovative digital products and platforms which cater to regulatory requirements, satisfy consumer demands and allow businesses to trade smoothly, which is the goal of *Draft Recommendation No. 49* and the UNTP DPP. They welcomed the update on this project and appreciated its collaborative approach with industry and governments to utilize international standards and interoperable systems. They are eager to realize the benefits of verifiable credentials for businesses and government authorities. In the case of *Draft Recommendation No. 49*, an inclusive and interoperable multilateral solution is essential to support innovation in sustainable trade, allowing for complementary products and platforms – including those under development in other fora and bodies – while minimizing unnecessary barriers to sustainable trade. Australia echoed the support of others and looked forward to further updates on this project ahead of its final release in 2025.

Decision 24-06

As a response to the outcomes of the 70th Commission session, the Plenary welcomed the technical dialogue on digital, sustainable and resilient value chains and highlighted its relevance to inclusive and resilient value chains and sustainable development.

The Plenary acknowledged progress on ECE *Draft Recommendation No. 49: Transparency at Scale* and on its accompanying global solutions, including the UNTP DPP, and requested that the project team enter into exchanges with national and regional DPP standards initiatives regarding scoping and to avoid incompatibility, wasted effort and to achieve a global framework. It also took note of the next steps towards the finalization of these and related deliverables in view of its next session in 2025.

Furthermore, the Plenary recognized the importance of effective coordination among international initiatives in this sphere, which is directly related to the ECE strategic priorities of the digital and green transformations to advance the circular economy in the ECE region and beyond.

VII. Review of the Bureau and regional rapporteurs' activities since the twenty-ninth Plenary (item 6)

50. The Chair presented the *UN/CEFACT Bureau Report of Developments*, providing an overview of activities during the period from the twenty-ninth Plenary until June 2024, including Bureau decisions, a summary of promotional activities and the project activities in each programme development area. The report highlights the following:

- Six regular Bureau calls, discussing project development and procedural points;
- Thirty-six Bureau decisions, as detailed in Annex I of the report;
- Fifty-two events in which UN/CEFACT was represented, detailed in Annex II of the report;
- Fifteen projects which were active or proposed during this period, detailed in Annex III of the report; and
- 1,618 experts are currently registered within UN/CEFACT.

51. The Chair invited the Vice-Chairs to briefly present the current work under their respective programme development areas, covering the status of ongoing projects and an overview of upcoming deliverables. The Chair underscored the importance of developing clear indicators to prioritize the maintenance and support of existing business standards and policy recommendations. The Bureau is also focusing on strategic directions such as enhancing partnerships, supporting fundraising activities and ensuring balanced representation of the public and private sectors. Furthermore, efforts are being made to align UN/CEFACT projects with the SDGs and to streamline project activities for greater efficiency and broader engagement.

52. Further, the Chair invited the regional rapporteurs for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean to report on activities related to UN/CEFACT in their respective regions. These reports outline regional initiatives and events aimed at enhancing trade facilitation and digital transformation, demonstrating a focused commitment to adopting modern technologies and standards to streamline cross-border trade and improve economic cooperation.

53. For Africa, the emphasis was on implementing single windows and aligning with existing systems to enhance trade facilitation while avoiding redundancy and promoting the use of digital tools like blockchain. The African Alliance for Electronic Trade plays a pivotal role in these efforts. For Asia and the Pacific, the focus was on ensuring smooth, cost-effective and safe data communication among trade partners to support sustainable development. This region operates through AFACT, which organizes various projects and initiatives, including the eAsia Award event, which recognizes significant projects in smart governance, digital transformation for SMEs, and sustainability. For Latin America and the Caribbean, the focus was on increasing participation and providing guidelines for governments to engage with UN/CEFACT standards.

54. The Chair thanked all the Bureau members and regional rapporteurs for their guidance, hard work and dedication during the last year. The Chair highlighted the significant progress made in various regions, noting increased participation and collaboration. Specifically, the efforts in Latin America (including Brazil, Uruguay and Mexico), Asia-Pacific and Sub-Saharan Africa were praised for their active involvement and valuable contributions. The Chair also acknowledged the crucial role of the heads of delegation in securing expert contributions, which are essential for the Bureau's work. The commitment to maintaining high standards, transparency and effective governance was reiterated, ensuring that the Bureau continues to meet its strategic objectives and deliver impactful outcomes.

Deliverables in support of implementation

(a) White papers for information

55. The following UN/CEFACT deliverables were presented to the Plenary for information:

- *White Paper on Geofencing Facilities in Transport and Logistics*: This white paper explores the implementation of geofencing technology to enhance the efficiency, security and environmental sustainability of transport and logistics operations. It discusses various benefits and challenges in adopting geofencing and provides recommendations for integrating this technology into existing logistics frameworks to streamline operations and reduce emissions.
- *White Paper on Gaps in Aligning Digitization with Transit Procedures*: This white paper identifies the challenges and gaps in the digitization of transit procedures, focusing on the difficulties faced by authorities and stakeholders in implementing digital trade documents for consignments in transit. It highlights the legal, technological and operational challenges and provides recommendations for improving the alignment of digitization efforts with transit requirements to ensure smoother and more efficient cross-border trade operations.

(b) Business requirements specifications

56. The following UN/CEFACT deliverables were presented to the Plenary for information:

- *Business Requirements Specification (BRS) on Digital Product Conformity Certificate Exchange*: This document proposes a data structure for the exchange and verification of product conformity information. It aims to enhance transparency and accountability by supporting the automated verification of key conformity assessment elements, addressing challenges such as outdated paper/PDF attestations and false connections between conformity data and supplied products. The deliverable aligns with international standards and frameworks to facilitate cross-border acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes;
- *BRS on the Trade Finance Documentary Credit Process*: This document standardizes the business processes, transactions and information entities involved in the documentary credit process in trade finance. It provides a comprehensive description of the roles and responsibilities of the trading partners, transport and logistics players and financial institutions, ensuring efficient interaction and reliable exchange of business documents; and
- *BRS on Product Circularity Data Use Case*: This document describes the data structures and processes needed to support circular economy initiatives in the textile and leather sectors. It provides use cases and detailed guidelines for the implementation of circularity data, promoting sustainability and traceability throughout the supply chain.

(c) Technical standards

57. The following UN/CEFACT deliverables were presented to the Plenary for information:

- UN/CEFACT Core Component Library (versions 23B and 24A)
(http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/unccl/ccl_index.html)
- UN/CEFACT XML Schema Library (versions 23B and 24A)
(http://www.unece.org/cefact/xml_schemas/index)
- UN/EDIFACT Directory (versions D.23A and D.24A)
(<https://unece.org/uncefact/unedifact/2021-2022>)
- UN/LOCODE Directory (versions 2023-1 and 2023-2)
(<http://www.unece.org/cefact/locode/welcome.html>)

- UN/CEFACT JSON-LD Web Vocabulary (<https://vocabulary.uncefact.org>)
- All UN/CEFACT e-business standards (<https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/mainstandards>)

58. All UN/CEFACT e-business context files, schemas, and OpenAPI specifications on the following:

- Open-source GitHub environment (<https://github.com/uncefact>)
- UN/CEFACT reference data models (RDMs) (<https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/rdm>)

59. The delegation of Germany raised questions related to the alignment of the Buy-Ship-Pay reference model with the JSON-LD web vocabulary as well as concerning the overall maintenance of UN/CEFACT standards. They requested to address any inconsistencies, (i.e. in the naming of classes) and misalignment of semantic information in future publications of UN/CEFACT standards as well as recommended to avoid manual editing for ensuring accuracy. They make several suggestions for the UN/CEFACT standards production process, including setting up a dedicated working group, consisting of the UN/CEFACT experts.

Decision 24-07

The Plenary took note of the *UN/CEFACT Bureau Report of Developments* and the *Report of the UN/CEFACT Regional Rapporteurs*.

The Plenary requested that the Bureau and the regional rapporteurs present a consolidated report on activities and flagship projects, focusing on impact and relevance, at the next Plenary in 2025.

Decision 24-08

The Plenary took note of the white papers, business requirements specifications, publications and the data exchange standards presented by the UN/CEFACT Bureau and requested that they continue to be updated on a regular basis, emphasizing the importance of maintaining such standards and promoting their uptake at the global, regional and national levels. The Plenary appreciated the joint ICC-ECE call to action launched at the 42nd UN/CEFACT Forum and invited policymakers and industry representatives to express their commitment to adopting digital standards. The Plenary requested that the secretariat report again in 2025 session and make an extra effort to seek extrabudgetary funding for relevant activities.

The Plenary emphasized the relevance of these activities to enhancing digital and green connectivity and highlighted their importance for capacity-building.

VIII. Updates from the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy (item 7)

60. Due to the unavailability of the Chair of the Team of Specialists (ToS) on ESG Traceability, the secretariat presented the *Report of the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy on its Third Session* for endorsement. On 23 November 2023, the ToS had its third session at Palais des Nations, Geneva and online, which involved 90 experts from more than 20 countries, representing a wide variety of stakeholders (governments, international organizations, the private sector, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations and standards-setting bodies). In particular, the third session aimed to define the format and the level of participation needed for a global collaboration to scale traceability and transparency for sustainable and inclusive value chains. The report contains a comprehensive summary of the key deliberations, looking at the landscape of initiatives related to ESG traceability and the role of multilateral cooperation for standard setting.

61. Successful standards have at least two qualities: (i) they fit the needs of users, and (ii) they are extensively used. Good standard-making processes engage as much as possible with potential users and build communities of users. The ToS is a means to do this. However, two significant challenges were flagged:

- The first is about the identification and engagement of users, particularly in the upstream part of the value chains (e.g. cotton farmers have no interest in standards processes); and
- The second is a systemic one, as designing stand-alone traceability standards will not be a success. Achieving sustainability through traceability and transparency requires a set of complementary, mutually supportive practices, all the way through global value chains. Only then, will a standard be used.

62. Therefore, this year the ToS has started convening leading initiatives on traceability and transparency in the garment and footwear sector, where there are several multistakeholder initiatives all along the value chain, and is helping them identify synergies, overlaps and gaps in their work and align them around a common goal. Furthermore, the ToS has connected with other initiatives on future solutions, such as for DPPs, data-sharing technologies or for creating trust to enable data sharing, with the goal that the interlinked community will co-create solutions (based on standards) which fit user needs, and at the same time create a community of future users.

63. To date, after three working meetings, one session and bilateral consultations, this approach is proving helpful, creating a focal point for user engagement and deliberations on a common future. The ToS aims to continue this approach and, where possible, expand it further to the value chains of agrifood and CRMs.

64. The secretariat informed the Plenary about the publication of the joint ECE-ECLAC study: *Improving the Sustainability of Used Clothing: Global, European and Chilean Perspectives*, submitted to the Plenary for information. It formulates policy recommendations to improve the economic, social and environmental outcomes of global trade in used clothes. A possible area of collaboration between UN/CEFACT and the study is the definition of global standards that identify requirements which distinguish second-hand clothing from textile waste. The work on used textiles trade and textiles circularity connects to the *BRS for the Product Circularity Data Use Case* standard, published in April 2024. The required data categories are undergoing a validation process so that they may be included in the United Nations Core Component Library (UN/CCL).

Decision 24-09

The Plenary expressed satisfaction with the work undertaken by the Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy.

It recognized the importance of the team's work in support of due diligence and verified ESG credentials in the value chains of priority sectors for the digital and green transition, including agrifood, critical raw materials and garment and footwear, and endorsed the *Report of the ToS on its Third Session*. Furthermore, the Plenary called on donors and development partners to consider providing additional funding for this important workstream.

IX. Updates from the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (item 8)

65. The Chair of the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) presented the *Report of the Advisory Group (AG) on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations*. She highlighted the successful convening of the 2024 UN/LOCODE AG meeting in Hamburg, Germany, and the appointments of the positions of Chair (from the United States) and Vice-Chair (from Brazil) by acclamation. The meeting facilitated crucial discussions among a diverse spectrum of stakeholders, including national governments, international organizations, NGOs and private sector entities. The Chair also presented the *Programme of Work for 2024-2025*. This document outlines distinct

work areas focusing on policy dialogue, technical support, capacity-building, communication, data quality, data exchange and the establishment of the UN/LOCODE Strategy Team to explore innovative directions and tackle key challenges. She further stressed the critical need for a sustainable funding mechanism to support the future work and tools of UN/LOCODE, aiming to mitigate new vulnerabilities in the supporting subsystems and to ensure its continuous enhancement and maintenance. The Chair concluded by emphasizing the importance of strong public-private partnerships in advancing the UN/LOCODE for global trade and logistics.

66. The secretariat provided updates highlighting significant activities and progress made by the UN/LOCODE AG, including the following:

- The publication of the 2023-1 and 2023-2 UN/LOCODE releases;
- The successful resolution of critical cybersecurity vulnerabilities and passing the United Nations OICT cybersecurity audit, with the deployment of the updated system on 18 June 2024;
- The adoption of a new organigram, establishing the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team and the UN/LOCODE Strategy Team to tackle new policy issues and system re-engineering; and
- The initiative to explore UN/LOCODE maintenance through a GitHub-based solution.

67. Further, the secretariat provided a SWOT⁴ analysis for UN/LOCODE. Strengths include its global standardization, comprehensive database, strong interagency collaboration and continuous improvement through regular updates. However, the system faces weaknesses such as aging infrastructure, limited resources and complexity in management. Opportunities lie in technological upgrades, expanded use cases, enhanced data quality and diverse funding avenues. Threats include cybersecurity risks, funding challenges and regulatory changes. Additionally, statistics highlighted the volume of data maintenance requests (DMRs) from various countries and companies, underscoring the system's extensive usage and the critical need for efficient data management and resource allocation to maintain its reliability and relevance. In 2023, a total of 1,575 DMRs were processed, with 569 approved, 359 postponed due to the absence of an active national focal point, and 236 were rejected. Furthermore, 409 requests were marked as blank and two were withdrawn, underscoring the significant volume of activity and the pressing need for efficient data management and enhanced system functionality to meet business demands.

68. The delegation of China expressed gratitude to the UN/LOCODE Maintenance Team, the Chair and the secretariat for their hard work and efforts, including the weekly maintenance work. China highlighted their commitment to supporting system development, particularly through the creation of a new platform for UN/LOCODE. They acknowledged the extensive efforts required for weekly maintenance and the importance of accurate geographic data verification. Furthermore, China stressed the necessity for continuous improvement and timely project initiation to enhance the system's capabilities.

69. The delegation of the United Kingdom expressed gratitude to the outgoing Chair of the AG and congratulated the newly appointed Chair and Vice-Chair. They raised the importance of having an updated and active list of focal points for both the country and its traders and suggested that the secretariat formally reach out to Member States in writing to request the names of their focal points. They shared their recent experience of updating their focal point and acknowledged the support received from the secretariat.

Decision 24-10

The Plenary expressed satisfaction with the work undertaken by the Advisory Group on the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE).

It recognized the group's critical role in facilitating global trade and transport logistics and endorsed the *Report of the UN/LOCODE AG on its 2024 meeting*.

⁴ Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).

Additionally, the Plenary took note of the EXCOM *Decisions relating to the UN/CEFACT* (ECE/EX/2024/L.3) to extend the mandate of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group for the period 2024-2025.

The Plenary noted the *Project Proposal on UN/LOCODE* and will explore modalities to mobilize additional resources to support the UN/LOCODE system enhancement.

X. Cooperation with international organizations, standard-setting bodies and other Economic Commission for Europe bodies (item 9)

70. The delegates were briefed on the activities of international organizations, standard-setting bodies and other ECE bodies on matters of potential interest to UN/CEFACT. This includes current and future activities of relevance that aim to enhance cooperation and further coordinate efforts to advance sustainable and digital trade facilitation.

71. The WCO representative highlighted the recent release of the WCO Data Model version 4.1.0, approved by the WCO council. This update is a significant milestone in harmonizing and streamlining customs procedures globally, enhancing interoperability among customs administrations and international trade stakeholders. They emphasized the potential for collaboration with UN/CEFACT to ensure greater consistency between the WCO Data Model and UN/CEFACT core component technical specifications, ultimately facilitating smoother and more efficient international trade operations. Additionally, the WCO is focusing on improving access to international code lists by proposing machine-readable formats and APIs, which would streamline data exchanges and reduce administrative burdens. Finally, they reported on the ongoing update of the WCO Single Window Compendium, seeking input and cooperation from international partners, including UN/CEFACT, to reflect the latest best practices and technological advancements.

72. The ISO representative discussed the recent initiation of the revision of ISO 7372, noting its importance in maintaining up-to-date standards for electronic data interchange for administration, commerce and transport. This revision aims to ensure the standards remain relevant and effective in facilitating international trade and logistics. They further highlighted the activities of the ECE-ISO Joint Working Group 9 (JWG 9), which focus on harmonizing and integrating standards to facilitate international trade and ensure seamless interoperability of trade-related data and processes.

73. The ITC representative acknowledged the complex standards discussed at the UN/CEFACT Forum and referred to the role of ITC in implementing these standards across various geographies to support the digitalization of trade-related procedures. Notable projects include the digitalization of certificates of origin in Central Asia, the exchange of laboratory protocols within the Eurasian Economic Union and the establishment of virtual line-management systems at borders. The ITC is also working on operationalizing electronic transit systems in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and establishing a single window in Guatemala, all while ensuring alignment with UN/CEFACT deliverables.

74. The UNCITRAL representative provided a comprehensive overview of the organization's efforts to harmonize and modernize international trade law in the area of electronic commerce. Over the past three decades UNCITRAL has developed various legislative texts to facilitate the use of electronic means in commercial activities. The publication of the *White Paper on the MLETR-Compliant Titles* was cited as an example of the close collaboration between UNCITRAL and UN/CEFACT. The Model Law on the Use and Cross-border Recognition of Identity Management and Trust Services and ongoing work by UNCITRAL on negotiable electronic cargo records were cited as areas for future collaboration with UN/CEFACT.

75. The representative from UNCTAD delivered insightful remarks regarding the organization's role in facilitating international trade and addressing digital transformation challenges. UNCTAD focuses on supporting developing countries through various initiatives aimed at improving trade logistics, digital trade and e-commerce. UNCTAD emphasized the importance of building digital capabilities and infrastructures in these countries to enhance their participation in global trade. They underscored the necessity of adopting international

standards and best practices to ensure interoperability and efficiency in trade processes. Furthermore, they pointed out the importance of public-private partnerships and the need for continuous dialogue and cooperation among stakeholders to overcome the barriers to digital transformation in trade. They highlighted ongoing projects and collaborations aimed at fostering sustainable trade practices and improving trade facilitation across different regions. The remarks reflected the UNCTAD commitment to leveraging technology and innovation to drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

76. The representative of the ECE Environment Division presented recent efforts under the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers that could promote green, sustainable and digital trade while enhancing ESG performance. Open for accession to all United Nations Member States, these treaties are focused on ensuring effective and inclusive public access to information, participation in decision-making, protection of environmental defenders and access to justice in environmental matters in different economic sectors like mining, extraction of critical raw materials and other sectors. Key activities included a dedicated workshop, organized in cooperation with UN/CEFACT and other partners, to promote access to product information; different meetings to promote modernization of pollutant release and transfer registers; and a collective redress mechanism for the public to access justice. Future priorities will be set during the 2025 meetings of the parties of both treaties.

77. The GIZ representative provided an overview of their regional project in Central Asia, which focuses on facilitating cross-border trade through digitalization, a core objective that aligns with the UN/CEFACT mission to simplify and harmonize international trade procedures. This involves the use of open and interoperable standards, which is a principle strongly supported by UN/CEFACT. He specifically mentioned the multimodal transport reference data model, a key initiative of UN/CEFACT, indicating the project's effort to align with this model to improve trade logistics and efficiency.

78. The IAPH representative emphasized the critical need to access operational planning data to improve resilience in supply chain operations. IAPH called for standardizing processes to enable cargo owners to view and manage their cargo across different transport modalities. The representative highlighted leading initiatives in Europe, Asia and the United States and proposed that this initiative be prioritized in the work programme for 2025-2026 to address the challenges faced by cargo owners in managing their supply chains.

79. The IATA representative shared insights into the digital transformation journey of the air cargo industry. Representing more than 300 member airlines, IATA facilitates 83 per cent of global air traffic. They noted that while air cargo represents only one per cent of global trade volumes, it accounts for 35 per cent by value, underscoring its importance for transporting valuable and time-sensitive goods. The representative also mentioned the IATA collaboration with UN/CEFACT to align standards and practices, ensuring that the air cargo industry benefits from the latest developments in digital trade facilitation and interoperability.

80. The FIATA representative outlined their efforts to facilitate trade through standardization and digitalization. The FIATA digital bill of lading (eFBL) sets a standard of excellence and interoperability in the freight-forwarding industry. The eFBL is endorsed by the International Chamber of Commerce and UNCTAD and conforms with relevant international conventions. The representative emphasized the importance of standardization to ensure consistent data exchange and noted that FIATA is working to align the eFBL with the WCO Data Model. They highlighted FIATA participation in the UNCITRAL meetings to develop a legal framework for negotiable multimodal transport documents. FIATA has been working closely with UN/CEFACT to align the eFBL with international standards and the WCO Data Model.

81. Reference was made to the continued cooperation of UN/CEFACT with international organizations and other ECE bodies and divisions, as well as past and forthcoming activities, including the 43rd UN/CEFACT Forum, which will be hosted by the Government of Italy on 10-12 December 2024 in Rome.

Decision 24-11

Noting the synergies between activities of the relevant international organizations, standards-setting bodies and working parties and sectoral committees within the ECE, the Plenary recommended that UN/CEFACT continue to enhance cooperation and further coordinate efforts to advance sustainable and digital trade facilitation. Furthermore, the Plenary called on donors and development partners to consider providing additional funding for joint activities.

XI. Programme of work of United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business for 2025-2026 (item 10)

82. The secretariat presented the *UN/CEFACT Programme of Work 2025-2026*, submitted by the Bureau for decision. The programme of work is closely aligned with ECE cross-cutting priority themes focusing on the circular economy, sustainable use of natural resources and the digital and green transformations for sustainable development. It outlines priorities for the coming years, including the focus on (i) enhancing digital connectivity for climate-smart trade and transport corridors; (ii) fostering sustainable, transparent and resilient value chains; (iii) increasing implementation of international legal instruments; and (iv) building the capacity of trade actors across supply chains. It stresses the importance of maintenance and development of UN/CEFACT outputs and explores opportunities for measurement of their impact and relevance.

83. The delegate of Australia expressed support for the proposed programme of work, emphasizing its focus on climate action, the UN SDGs and improved access to traceability standards for sustainable supply chains. They stressed that it is crucial for UN/CEFACT to operate openly and transparently, using public standards development and modern, open platforms to maintain confidence in its governance model, which relies on voluntary expert labour. They urged the Bureau and experts to manage and report all projects and outcomes transparently. They also welcomed cooperation with partner organizations, including in the context of supporting implementation of the WTO TFA, and suggested preparing a report for the next Plenary on the programme's impact with specific, measurable indicators.

84. The delegate of Germany thanked the secretariat for the constructive discussions during the Plenary and appreciated the compromise reached in the context of the decision under agenda item 5.

Decision 24-12

The Plenary approved the *UN/CEFACT Programme of Work 2025-2026*, noting the prioritization and streamlining of efforts and stronger focus on (i) enhancing digital connectivity for climate-smart trade and transport corridors; (ii) fostering sustainable, transparent and resilient value chains; (iii) increasing implementation of international legal instruments; and (iv) building the capacity of trade actors across supply chains.

The Plenary invited United Nations Member States, donors and development partners to support the secretariat and the Bureau in mobilizing resources for the implementation of the UN/CEFACT programme of work.

Decision 24-13

The Plenary approved the proposal by the secretariat and Bureau to rename the Trade Facilitation Section, which provides secretariat support to UN/CEFACT, to the Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation Section.

XII. Review of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business structure, mandate, terms of reference and procedures (item 11)

85. The secretariat presented the *Proposed Amendments to the Consolidated United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business Mandate and Terms of Reference (Section D – The Bureau)* for consideration and a subsequent decision on the way forward. The proposed amendments pertain to the governance structure of UN/CEFACT and

the possible establishment of a technical advisory group to the Bureau and their respective responsibilities. The secretariat mentioned that the proposal tabled for discussion was drafted following deliberations on prospective directions for UN/CEFACT at the twenty-ninth UN/CEFACT Plenary of 2023, as outlined in the report under agenda item 11, and thereafter based on consultations with the Bureau, domain coordinators, and HoDs.

86. The delegate of Singapore supported the proposed amendments to section D regarding the creation of the technical advisory group as well as focusing the role of the Bureau on most strategic areas in running the organization. At the same time, he expressed a reservation regarding Figure 1 of the document, that the technical advisory group acts as an additional layer of governance between the project teams and the Bureau and suggested instead that the technical advisory group be placed next to the secretariat, with the domains being accountable to the Bureau, as per the current structure.

87. The delegate of the Russian Federation appreciated the timely discussion on this note and requested that a detailed report, outlining any structural and operational challenges, be prepared for the next Plenary. They indicated that any significant changes to the mandate and terms of reference require wider and transparent consultations and suggested using provisions under paragraph 37 of the current document (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/15) for appointing advisors or setting up task teams.

88. The delegate of Germany appreciated the work of the secretariat and UN/CEFACT volunteers, especially in updating these documents. They asked that the requested report on operational challenges also cover the analysis of the current processes, identifying strengths, weaknesses and potential improvements. They concluded with suggesting that this report be submitted within six months.

89. The delegate of Australia supported the proposed changes to the UN/CEFACT structure, mandate and terms of reference. They stressed that clearer distinctions between the Bureau's governance roles and the technical advisory group's project management roles will improve UN/CEFACT governance and enhance trust in UN/CEFACT processes. They also added that strengthening principles to promote a Bureau with mixed public and private sector expertise further supports the UN/CEFACT hybrid governance model. They supported the proposal of a report at the next Plenary using specific, measurable impact indicators.

Decision 24-14

The Plenary took note of the proposed amendments to the *Consolidated UN/CEFACT Mandate and Terms of Reference*, stressing the importance of continued consultation between the United Nations Member States, the extended Bureau and the secretariat.

The Plenary referred to paragraph 37 of the *Consolidated UN/CEFACT Mandate and Terms of Reference* (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/15) and advised the Bureau to consider activating proposed mechanisms to support its activities, including for the enhancement of the UN/CEFACT governance, as necessary.

The Plenary further requested that the Bureau and the secretariat report on operational challenges, if any, to the next Plenary.

XIII. Follow-up to the evaluation of ECE subprogramme 4 (Economic cooperation and integration) and subprogramme 6 (Trade) by the Office of Internal Oversight (item 12)

90. In 2022, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability and integration of cross-cutting issues in ECE subprogramme 4 (Economic cooperation and integration) and subprogramme 6 (Trade) for 2018-2021. The evaluation was part of the UN Secretariat's regular programme, which periodically evaluates selected aspects of its operations.

91. The Director of the ECTD presented the progress made in implementing the recommendations made by the OIOS, as they pertain to subprogramme 6. She reported on the success of the evaluation, which resulted in four recommendations: (a) implementing a technical cooperation request-tracking mechanism; (b) developing a division-wide,

integrated strategic plan; (c) creating divisional action plans on resource mobilization, partnerships and technical cooperation; and (d) integrating gender, environment, disability inclusion and human rights. She informed the Plenary about the progress made in addressing these recommendations, including the development of the summaries of the technical assistance requests presented to ECTD intergovernmental bodies, as well as the ECE-wide online tool to track all technical cooperation requests, which is being rolled out across ECE, including ECTD. She also informed the Plenary about piloting a division-wide response to cross-cutting priority themes and expanding cooperation across subprogrammes and sections and scheduling intergovernmental events to facilitate cross-fertilization (e.g. the Regional Conference on the Circular Economy on 26 June 2024). While referring to some developments to ensure the integration of human rights considerations in ECTD workstreams, such as the Sustainability Pledge and ESG Traceability (due diligence), she noted that this area remains a work in progress, with further developments expected before next year's report.

92. The Director also expressed concern over the so-called "liquidity crisis" of the United Nations, which has disrupted the division's ability to fulfil its mandates. The crisis has led to a shortage of human resources, particularly managerial and administrative staff and consultants, resulting in delays in the delivery of parliamentary documents, the publication of standards, the update of websites and delays on administrative actions on extrabudgetary resources. The lack of regular budget funds also limits the ECE secretariat's participation in the meetings of partner organizations, such as the UNCTAD World Investment Forum, the WTO thirteenth Ministerial Conference, COP 28, and in bringing experts to ECE meetings in Geneva.

Decision 24-15

The Plenary welcomed the report on progress made on implementing the recommendations of the evaluation of subprogramme 4 and subprogramme 6 (implemented by the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division), undertaken by the OIOS, notably on the technical cooperation request tracking mechanism.

The Plenary also invited its Bureau to work with the secretariat on the implementation of the recommendations and to report back in 2025. It called on Member States and development partners to work with the secretariat to support of the implementation of the ECE strategies on resource mobilization, partnerships and technical cooperation.

XIV. Other business (item 13)

93. No other business points were raised.

XV. Adoption of decisions and the draft report of the thirtieth session (agenda 14)

94. The Plenary confirmed the approval of the decisions. As for the report, the secretariat announced that it will be circulated to all Geneva Permanent Representations and the Bureau for subsequent approval.

Plenary decision 24-16: The Plenary approved the decisions of UN/CEFACT at its thirtieth session. The Plenary requested that the secretariat distribute the report to all Geneva Permanent Representations and the UN/CEFACT Bureau for subsequent approval by silence procedure, in line with the guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies.