

**Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)**  
**ToS-GRS teleconference discussion notes and actions**  
**6 November 2024, 12:00 CET**

| Item | Subject                | Discussion / Action  |
|------|------------------------|--|
| 1a   | Roll call              | <p><b>Leadership:</b> <u>Michelle Parkouda</u> (Chair), <u>Lucy Salt</u> (Vice-Chair)<br/> <b>Secretariat:</b> Lance Thompson<br/> <b>Members:</b> <u>Adriana Martins</u> (CEN/CENELEC), <u>Andia Persad Maharaj</u> (TTBS), <u>Analia Purita</u> (IRAM), <u>Caitlin Kraft-Buchman</u> (Women-at-the-table), <u>Carla Gordon</u> (INEN), Davit Tkemaladze (GeoSTM), <u>Dorte Kulle</u> (DS), <u>Ekaterine Labadze</u> (GeoSTM), <u>Florence Uwatwembi</u> (RSB), <u>Jana Bante</u> (BMZ), <u>Joanna Gajdek</u> (ASI), <u>Gisèle Beleck à Koung</u> (ANOR), <u>Grace Bolan</u> (ASME), <u>Nadia Aslan</u> (SMIIC), <u>Paola Travaini</u> (UNI), Paul Passerat (AFNOR), <u>Sari Winasis Basuki</u> (DIN), Sarid Sriduandao (TISI), Sazi Zangqa (SABS), <u>Sevde Ozbey</u> (SMIIC), <u>Susana Martins</u> (IPQ)<br/> <b>Experts:</b><br/> <u>Cynthia Finley</u>, Daniel Hobbs, <u>Diana Lutta</u>, <u>Jamilla Mendoza</u>, <u>Jane Korinek</u>, <u>Lena Dargham</u>, <u>Meredith Shaddix</u>, <u>Parascovia Sava</u>, <u>Sandra Gonzalez</u>, Subrata Dey, Tushit Kamal<br/> (35 participants (<u>27 women</u>))</p>  |
| 1b   | Approval of the Agenda | Agenda agreed with no modifications  |
| 2    | Invited guest speaker  | <p>Mariangela Linoci, Economic Affairs Officer at UNCTAD provided an overview of their work on <i>The impact of non-tariff measures on women's e-commerce businesses in developing countries</i>.</p> <p>In 2019 e-commerce represented about 30% of global GDP, valued at 26.7 trillion dollars. MSMEs leveraging e-commerce experience faster growth and higher survival rates. But there are some challenges related to internet access, limited digital skills, logistics, payment systems, and ICT security among potentially others.</p> <p>Women owned businesses are often MSMEs and often over-represented in low-value added sectors. E-commerce represents an opportunity for such smaller businesses and provides flexibility to manage their time and requires lower capital upfront. E-commerce platforms often offer tools that facilitate business management and approaching other markets; they sometimes even integrate online learning, making it easier to obtain entrepreneurship skills. In this way, e-commerce platforms could help empower women owned MSMEs to approach other markets.</p> <p>There are some challenges though. The digital aspects (including cybersecurity) could be a barrier. The platforms may help to enter low-value added sectors to the market, but these often lack scale and it might trap them into an informal sector (like handicrafts) which helps at first, but doesn't allow to grow afterwards.</p> <p>Non-tariff measures (NTMs, measures which define the product requirements which are not necessarily a barrier to trade, but could be) are increasing; within a decade, there have been over 5000 new NTMs notified to the World Trade Organization. NTMs are not different for e-commerce businesses, though they could have a higher impact as these businesses have easier access to international markets. NTMs come at a cost to companies: the indirect cost of learning how they relate to the business' products, the direct cost of complying with the measures, the direct cost of testing and conformity measures and the indirect time-related costs. This cost can be a higher burden for MSMEs due to their smaller firm size. The company size is one of the root causes of the main issues facing women owned businesses. Next generation NTMs related to data privacy rules, cybersecurity and cross-border data flow regulations can present a specific challenge for MSMEs (cost and training).</p> <p>Women owned businesses are often in less profitable sectors like agriculture and textiles where NTMs are more prevalent. The cost of compliance can have a greater impact than on</p> |

|   |                                  |  |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
|   |                                  | <p>other sectors; the fixed cost related to compliance tend to be higher. There can also be challenges with border clearance time due to gendered traditions. Next generation NTMs pose specific challenges to learn about the digital trends.</p> <p>NTMs can provide some benefits, specifically to the general areas where women's e-commerce businesses operate. For example, NTMs on agricultural and food sector may foster trade and build confidence in foreign products (as they must comply with strict requirements).</p> <p>Moving forward, domestic policy reforms addressing gender-specific barriers in e-commerce (digital divide, digital skills development) could be enhanced. Frameworks that reduce NTM burdens and create a conducive environment for women entrepreneurs in e-commerce (improving sources of information on market access, simplifying and harmonizing trade rules, creating channels to report complaints) could also be explored.</p> <p>A question was raised concerning the data used for this study, if it was primary data or secondary data, and if there is any statistics on rural versus urban areas of establishment of such women businesses (the reasons for trading being possibly different). The data used was secondary, from the World Bank Enterprise Survey and there was no distinction between rural and urban; however, all the data was focused on formal trade -not addressing informal) as the study was about meeting NTM requirements.</p> <p>A question was raised concerning the access to information as this can be a huge barrier to women owned e-commerce businesses, if there are any initiatives, platforms or frameworks to provide information on market access. The role of e-commerce platforms can help to navigate the complexities and regulations; the platforms are often positive in this way, helping to access markets and understand the rules; however, the cost may be prohibitive for some smaller businesses.</p> <p>A question was raised on the explanations of the longer processing times at borders. More information on this could be found in the <a href="#">World Bank data</a>.</p> <p>A question was raised if there were comparisons between e-commerce businesses and traditional businesses and if the difficulties faced by women are similar in both cases, or if there are aspects specific to e-commerce businesses. The e-commerce does help to actually open opportunities; studies have shown though that the patterns and outcomes remain the same for both types of businesses.</p> <p>The Chair and the Team thanked the speaker.</p> |
| 3 | Brainstorming on future speakers | <p>The Chair opened the floor for any ideas on future guest speakers for the regular meetings or for volunteers who would like to share their experiences to the next ToS-GRS annual session during the 4<sup>th</sup> WP.6 Forum. It was underlined that there may be a need to limit the number of sharing of experiences during the Forum (for timing reasons). There were volunteers from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEN/CENELEC on their GAP</li> <li>• Rwanda on their gender equity certification scheme and training gender experts</li> <li>• South Africa on their GAP path</li> <li>• Denmark</li> </ul> <p>There was also a request to see if an international standards body such as IEC might be willing to provide input on their progress on GRS and GAP.</p> <p>⇒ The Secretariat to follow up when the agendas for the Forum are being prepared.</p> <p>There were no comments on potential future guest speakers and no objections to continuing with the current model of guest speakers.</p>   |
| 4 | Update from the Secretariat      | <p>The Secretary provided an update on UNECE elements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The publication on a “Multilingual glossary on gender and trade” has been finalized in English, Russian, French and Spanish and formatted. It is currently waiting on the ISBN number (should be received this week or early next week) and then will go to publication. It should be available on line by December.</li> <li>• The extra-budgetary project for gender mainstreaming throughout the quality infrastructure for trade is still pending internal approvals. There is currently no timeline and it is looking like the launch events in January may be too ambitious; they may need to be differed to March 2025.</li> </ul>  |

|   |                               |   |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
|   |                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The UNECE held an event on 21-22 October on the regional progress of the Beijing +30 review. The event was articulated around a number of themes (economic empowerment, women in leadership, ending violence, leveraging financing). The <a href="#">event website</a> has all of the presentations and documents. It also has the complete national review of each UNECE member State.</li> <li>• The secretariat is advancing with a proposed blueprint on gender action plans within standards bodies and other quality infrastructure bodies. An initial draft should be circulated prior to the next meeting after being cleared by the ToS-GRS Bureau.</li> <li>• There have been no new signatories to the Declaration; we are still at 86 signatories.</li> </ul>  |
| 5 | 2025 meetings                 | <p>The Secretariat shared the proposed 2025 schedule of WP.6 meetings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ToS-GRS will be scheduled to meet on: 19 Feb., 8 Apr. (annual meeting during Forum), 18 June, 17 Sept. and 12 Nov. All calls would be scheduled to start at 13:00 (WP.6 Bureau request).</li> <li>• The Forum will be a hybrid event from 7 to 11 April. It will be held at the same time as the UNECE Commission Session (highest level body of ECE), 9-10 April. It is hoped that the GRS-themed conference can attract some of the commission delegates as a pre-event to their Session.</li> <li>• The WP.6 35<sup>th</sup> Session is scheduled 9-10 Sept.</li> <li>• Document deadline for (final) submissions to the Session will be 30 May.</li> </ul>  |
| 6 | Brainstorming on new projects | <p>The Chair asked if there were any ideas for new projects or activities within the ToS-GRS. There was a suggestion to launch a project on gender and artificial intelligence (from a trade and standardization point of view). The Chair requested any input or comments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was suggested that a topic on gender and AI would need to focus the scope as it could be too large. It was suggested to perhaps concentrate on <u>how exactly gender would play out in AI standards</u>; many people state that AI is just a technical issue, so it will be necessary to explain the linkage and the risk if gender is not considered and/or what can be gained when gender is given appropriate consideration in AI standards. It should concentrate on how gender plays out in the standards (qualitative) and not how it can potentially help women approach trade (quantitative).</li> <li>• The Danish Standards Body has been working on a specification on AI and bias (in general) in cooperation with the business authorities and the Copenhagen Univ. They will try to check.</li> <li>• It was suggested that we could see if there are other studies which exist that could be consulted. It was noted that there is currently a tremendous body of information on bias and AI, but there is not any work currently on gender-responsive standards for AI and that this is where we could add value; we need to articulate the information in a way which will be useful to standards bodies.</li> </ul> |
| 7 | AOB                           | <p>A question was raised concerning the 2011 UN OHCHR <a href="#">Working Group on Business and Human Rights</a> and if the work of the ToS-GRS was raised here. The guiding principles have been developed from this group and gender has been included.</p> <p>Secretariat will discuss with the Brazilian Delegation to the WTO on gender and standards.</p>   |
|   |                               | Next ToS-GRS call: 19 February, from 13:00 CET (Geneva-time).   |