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Report of the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group on its first meeting

I. Attendance

1. The United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) Advisory Group held its first meeting from 30 November to 1 December 2017.
2. The following countries were represented: Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Russian Federation, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine. The following United Nations organizations participated in the meeting: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and Universal Postal Union (UPU). The following intergovernmental organizations and private sector participants participated in the meeting: adidas AG, Bureau International des Containers (BIC), Cosco, EuroGate Container Terminals, GeoNames, Google Switzerland, GT Nexus, Hamburg Sud, Hapag-Lloyd, International Air Transport Association (IATA), IHS Markit, Maersk Line, MSC, Ostendi Suisse AG, Shipping Guides, and Ship-planning Message Design Group (SMDG).
3. The Acting Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group delivered opening remarks, highlighting the importance of UN/LOCODE and the establishment of the Advisory Group. They also underlined the effective partnership between public and private sector as well as the relevance of UN/LOCODE to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

II. Discussion on development issues

4. On the subject of data synchronisation between the UN/LOCODE releases and user applications/databases, presentations were made by IMO, SMDG, and GT Nexus. The paperwork involved with Data Maintenance Requests, the ambiguity of some of the elements related to UN/LOCODE leaves a lot of room for interpretation. It was stated that greater international consistency in interpretations and in the levels of granularity would be beneficial to all users. It was stressed that it is important to provide a clear definition of what is meant by “location.” Some users do not have an automatic data synchronisation and only update their systems at the request of users.

5. On the subject of UN/LOCODE entries, the definitions provided for the functions in Recommendation 16 do not seem to be applied in a consistent manner. The official definitions of function 6 (inland clearance depot) would imply that these must be related to a customs procedure and authorization; function 1 (port) implies that it should only be for maritime ports; function 5 (postal exchange office) should only be for international mail processing centers and thus only approved by UPU; function 4 (airports) should perhaps be validated by either IATA, ICAO or both. It was pointed out that the location names need to be as precise as possible; the problem of translated entries (code present several times with each translation of the name) can cause confusion. It was also noted that pending requests should be regularised as quickly as possible.

6. On the subject of data quality, the Focal Point of Cyprus pointed out the necessity of having geographically correct entries with correct location names for locations that are relevant to international trade (i.e. used regularly for international trade). It was pointed out the need to address locations that are de facto outside the effective control of governments. The question of who can make requests and how these are validated was brought up. It was suggested, though, that for retail purposes, it is very useful to have a UN/LOCODE which is a free and open standard, even for very small locations. Furthermore, many inconsistencies were underlined such as function 1 (port) being used in inland locations, very small locations with no link to international trade with codes, single locations with multiple codes. The UNECE secretariat pointed out the importance of Focal Points on this matter as they should be verifying content and correctness; the secretariat can only verify coherency to the rules.

7. On the subject of major changes in the releases, it was underlined that these, like the one of 2014, can cause major perturbations to the user community. Changing established codes should be avoided, or at the least a pre-notification of future changes of up to a year was requested. Care should be taken to avoid recycling codes for different locations which can have a major impact on the users.

8. On the subject of which concept should be supported, point or area, presentations were offered from Hapag-Lloyd, GeoNames, Cosco and IATA. The principle of supporting “area” for a canal, for example, could be pertinent for the user community, especially for routing purposes. It was further suggested that port facilities should be treated as areas and that other related codes be used to identify container terminals or quays. However, if an “area” is supported, questions were raised as to how to delimit these, as circles, polygons, municipalities... In other location code uses, Metropolitan areas are used for pricing and scheduling purposes, but not for actual routing. There was also a request to have a geolocation coordinate for all UN/LOCODEs even when “areas” (but not necessarily specific points).

9. The issue of child coding systems was presented with interventions from IMO, BIC and Portinfo. For two of these, UN/LOCODE is used as a base and a four character extension (some child repositories are up to six) is used to identify legal entities for container transactions and provide more granularity on actual terminals within a port. It was underlined that complete contact details of the requestor of any code is linked to some of these child coding systems. The integration of information from the UN/LOCODE publications was underlined as important in all cases. And it was suggested that it would be beneficial to the user community to publish these child repositories – perhaps in a harmonized manner –with the official UN/LOCODE repository or at perhaps a link out to their solutions. Cross-referencing to IATA, ICAO, IMO location codes was suggested as a benefit for users. A question was raised if we should only have one entry for one place or if we should allow hierarchies.

III. Discussion on development issues

10. It has been discussed in the three previous UN/LOCODE meetings to establish a network of Focal Points which has instigated a proposal to revise the current data maintenance system

and database. IHS proposed an interactive system to request new UN/LOCODEs or revise existing ones; they proposed to be more reactive in changes and new requests so there could be publications throughout the year instead of only twice a year. The management of validation should also be automated if possible, instead of Excel Spreadsheets.

11. The secretariat explained the work load of UN/LOCODE internally. As a result the network of Focal Points have been put into place in order to assist in this process. However not all countries have a National Focal Point and not all FPs are actively contributing as of today. For this reason the secretariat requested ideas which could improve this situation.

12. Several ways forward were suggested:

- Requesting a nominal fee in order to ensure discipline by the requestors;
- Require requestors to motivate their DMRs, why they request a change or a new code (make the comment field obligatory);
- The nomination of a National Focal Point can also have a positive effect, with progressively reduced number of DMRs has drastically gone down;
- Crowdsourcing identification, having multiple stakeholders validate a port or location;
- Avoid requesting that people who actually participate in the process (so present here and active in this group) should not be required to pay;
- Require requestors to pre-register before they can download to learn their use case – but keeping the process free of charge;
- Study the possibility of having a donor providing or developing a new IT system to the secretariat free of charge which could be hosted on UN platforms compliant to UN rules;
- Establish a group of experts (perhaps with a sufficiently large enough group in order to not always rely on the same people) that support Focal Points in validating new code requests and changes – this would require a lot of work twice a year when validation is being performed. Those who manage child repositories are very interested.

IV. Decisions of the Advisory Group and inputs to UN/CEFACT Programme of Work

13. The UN/LOCODE Advisory Group

- Acknowledging the importance of UN/LOCODE as a free international standard with a wide use on trade, transport and regulatory documents;
- Recognizing that the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group play an indispensable role of dealing with all important issues related to UN/LOCODE maintenance and development;
- Congratulating Ms. Sue Probert as the first chair of the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group;
- Agreeing that all decisions be made on the basis of consensus and be reported to the next UN/CEFACT Plenary;
- Noting that the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group be open for all stakeholders on a volunteer basis;
- Taking note with appreciation of the recent work undertaken by UNECE secretariat;

- Taking further note that all members of UN/LOCODE Advisory Group be registered as a UN/CEFACT expert and on the Collaborative UN/CEFACT Environment (CUE);
- Invite UN/CEFACT to revise the UNECE Recommendation 16 through the ODP procedure taking into consideration the following elements (**Decision 17-01**)
 - Provide a clear definition of what the UN/LOCODE actually means, its scope and what granularity should be used;
 - Provide clear guidance on all aspects of UN/LOCODE in order to eliminate areas of ambiguity (interpretation of what is a location, addition of new functions, definitions of functions...);
 - Set out how to register significant changes (what this means, if deletion should be allowed, what delay should be provided to allow the user community to prepare...);
 - How DMRs should be announced and communicated (acknowledgement of receipt of DMR, acknowledgement once it has been accepted or rejected with the reasons...);
 - Officialise the use of “0” (zero) as a location that does not have an official function (function zero should not be accumulated with any other function) – this could also be used to deprecate codes without deleting it in the list;
 - Suggest to register who requested a code (for post-verifications or future questions);
 - Consider how to share the history of DMRs;
 - Standardize how to have multi-lingual entries and aliases in an unambiguous way;
 - Propose ways forwards on the re-use of UN/LOCODEs (in child repositories, for example) and how these could be identified and shared in the UN/LOCODE repository.
- Emphasize the importance of the UN/LOCODE Focal Points and encourage more governments to nominate National Focal Points (NFPs) in order to enhance the UN/LOCODE Focal Point Network. (**Decision 17-02**)
- Request that the Secretariat create a questionnaire (with Survey Monkey or other) in order to build consensus on some of the key appoints. (**Decision 17-03**).
- Request the UNECE secretariat to acknowledge child-coding systems using the UN/LOCODE (**Decision 17-04**).
- Request the UNECE secretariat to organize meetings for the Advisory Group on a regular basis, at least annually (**Decision 17-05**).
- Welcome the establishment of more National Focal Points and more key stakeholders to join the Advisory Group.

VI. Adoption of decisions and report

14. The UN/LOCODE Advisory Group adopted the decisions noted above and the report of the first meeting (**Decision 17-06**).

