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Recommendations and standards

Related issues

Final Executive Guide on UN/EDIFACT

Summary

In order to provide a high-level visibility to UN/CEFACT's standards and other technical deliverables, the UN/CEFACT Bureau, with support from the ECE Secretariat, will prepare a series of non-technical summaries addressed to policy makers and a general audience.

The Executive Guide on UN/EDIFACT is an example of this new type of deliverable.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2016/7/Rev.1 is submitted to the twenty-third UN/CEFACT Plenary for noting.

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I. Introduction

1. United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT) is the global Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) standard developed and maintained by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). EDI is defined as “computer to computer interchange of data according to a message standard with a minimum of human intervention”. Differently said, it allows for business documents such as purchase orders, invoices and customs declarations to be exchanged and processed electronically. UN/EDIFACT development started at the end of the 1980s and the standard currently contains 209 business messages. Updated versions are published twice a year.

II. Applications

2. UN/EDIFACT is used by most international sectors, both in public and private domains, such as retail, transport and logistics, customs, healthcare, agriculture and insurance. No comprehensive information on global implementation is available but statistics from one sector alone showed that UN/EDIFACT was used by more than 100,000 companies and organizations in 2014 with a predicted growth of 10% for 2015.

III. Benefits

3. Generally, EDI provides multiple advantages such as streamlined and cost efficient business processes, increased consumer and patient safety through reliable traceability systems, and significant environmental improvement by reducing paper and optimising the use of transport vehicles and infrastructure.

4. The UN/EDIFACT standard is well suited to achieve these benefits since:

- More than 25 years of development has provided a solid and rich content applicable to thousands of business processes;
- The standard is continually maintained in order to ensure that it is adapted to changes in processes, regulations and new areas;
- Throughout the years, the principle of “backwards compatibility” has been enforced, meaning the users of different versions can exchange messages without problems; and
- The high and increasing number of users ensures a wide pool of expert knowledge globally and affordable software tools.

IV. More information

5. The UN/EDIFACT standard for EDI is available free of charge on the UN/CEFACT website.¹

¹ <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/un-centre-for-trade-facilitation-and-e-business-uncfact/outputs/standards/unedifact/directories/download.html>