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## Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

### Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardisation Policies (WP.6)

Twenty-seventh session

Geneva, 28 (pm) – 30 November 2017

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

International Conference on “Standards for the Sustainable Development Goals”

## Gender Informed Standards and Technical Regulations

Submitted by the Secretariat

### *Mandate*

At the twenty-sixth session of the Working Party, Member States gave a mandate to the Bureau and the Secretariat to initiate consultations on a roadmap and recommendation on mainstreaming gender into standards and regulatory policies nationally and internationally.

### *Summary*

Wide-ranging consultations with UN Member States within and beyond the UNECE region, standardization bodies, the civil society and other UN Agencies achieved consensus that standards are a powerful tool for the empowerment of women and their participation in economic activities and economic governance. However, there is an insufficient understanding of how to identify and correct if present a gender bias both in standards as documents, and in standardization and standards-related activities more generally. Additionally, participation by women in standardization activities is still very low.

### *Proposed decision*

Member States renew their mandate to the Secretariat and the Bureau to progress the implementation of the plan of action included in Section IV of this document and to report

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on progress at the next Working Party session.
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## 1. Introduction

1. Following up to the mandate received at the previous Working Party session, the Secretariat reached out to Member States and standardization bodies, both in the UNECE region and globally, to identify relevant stakeholders.
2. The Secretariat then organized one physical meeting of interested parties on 4<sup>th</sup> April, and 5 webinars on: 4<sup>th</sup> May, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 12<sup>th</sup> June, July 13<sup>th</sup> and September 15<sup>th</sup>.

## 2. Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> April meeting

3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following organizations: Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe, British Standards Institution (BSI), DRR Dynamics, EDGE Certified Foundation, Gender and Mine Action Programme, the Institute for Standardization of Moldova, the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), International Gender Champions & Women@theTable, the International Organisation for Standardization, the ISO/TC 68/SC 4 dealing with financial services, Permanent Mission of France to the UN Office Geneva, Permanent Mission of Sweden to the UN Office Geneva, Permanent Mission of Romania to the UN Office Geneva, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Swedish Standards Institute, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe(UNECE), UNAIDS, UNICEF, World Meteorological Organisation (WMO), WorkSafe New Zealand.
4. They represented a diverse group of stakeholders and a large blend of expertise. While introducing themselves and their institutions, they made the following points:
  - Standards bodies are very interested in strengthening the role of women in the process of making standards;
  - Regulators and other standards users need to have standards of good quality that could be used with confidence for policy-making purposes;
  - Representatives of women associations including vulnerable women expressed the need for standards that have a positive impact on women's lives.
5. The meeting was facilitated by the Senior Policy Advisor on Gender Mainstreaming of the UNDP New York Office and hosted by the "She Trades" programme of the International Trade Centre. The list of participants and the presentations are all available online, at <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=45465>
6. The UNECE, UNDP, and ITC representatives made brief introductory remarks. The facilitator introduced gender equality as a goal and gender mainstreaming as a strategy. She clarified that the group could work on two different priorities: it could focus either on gender specific standards or on mainstreaming gender across all standards and across the process of standards making. Within this second priority, the group could also choose to focus on the standard organizations and how they integrate gender equality internally or the group can focus on the different stages of developing standards.
7. The facilitator explained that by choosing organizations as the entry point, our interventions are more sustainable and comprehensive but require long-term investments. She explained the Theory of Change on Gender Mainstreaming within organizations used

by the UNDP Gender Certification Programme which shows how synergies among management systems, capacities, partnerships, knowledge and enabling environment lead to efficient development of gender equality results, in this case, gender responsive standards.

8. The UNDP facilitator suggested several entry points for mainstreaming gender in standards. These are detailed in Box 1 below:

<p><b>Text box 1</b>  <b>Entry points for gender mainstreaming in the standards development process</b></p> <p><u>Before the development of the standard:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender-responsive selection of subject matter</li> <li>• Analysis of the possible gender implications of the standards</li> <li>• Gender representative in the composition of the standards development committee</li> <li>• Gender-responsive design of the consultation process</li> </ul> <p><u>During the development of the standard</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using the findings of the gender analysis to inform the standard draft</li> <li>• Engaging women’s organizations and / or gender experts during the development and consultations</li> <li>• Highlighting gender in discussions with stakeholders</li> </ul> <p><u>In the standard (i.e. the physical document)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating solutions to address gender differences / eliminate gender bias</li> </ul> <p><u>In the implementation of the standard</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender-informed educational activities</li> <li>• Measuring the impact of the standards on women and men</li> <li>• Ensuring that conformity assessment processes are gender-informed.</li> </ul>
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9. Participants discussed whether gender could be addressed as part of diversity. One of the participants said that his organization had a policy to ensure that a standard is universally relevant – for example across climatic conditions – and accessible to all – including to the disabled. That policy also – from his point of view – could cover women as one of the aspects of diversity. Other participants expressed the following thoughts:

- Gender is the only aspect of diversity that is analytically accessible in every country;
- Women are half of the populations while disadvantaged groups are a minority;
- Women’s needs are different in that they change through their lifetimes – for example because of their child-bearing role;

- There is no need to prove or even discuss that increased participation of women in standards processes led to better standards, as it is a worthwhile goal from a societal point of view, as it contributes to their empowerment; and because there is enough evidence from a wide variety of other contexts of the value added and positive impacts gained by having a gender balanced / diverse group of participants
  - Because privilege is always invisible to those who have it, women will bring value to the standards process by perceiving aspects that men may fail to see.
10. Other points made during the discussion:
- The very low participation of women in standards setting is an undisputed fact. There is little data available about the participation of women in standardization. For example, a survey by BSI indicated that women were, approximately, about 11 % of the 11'000 experts voluntarily involved in the BSI activities.
  - Increased participation by women was seen by all participants as a value per se, as it would lead to better quality standards – although not all participants agreed that standards themselves (in their content and/or implementation) were at present moment necessarily gender biased.
  - There is some evidence that women's participation improves the quality of the standards: one example being standards for humanitarian demining. However it was, in general, accepted by the group that more participation by women would improve not only the technical aspects but also the “soft” aspects because of the mounting body of evidence from other contexts.
  - Some standards may already be at least in part gender informed. For example, IEC takes into account the different effect of the electric current in the body for men and women, and gendered tests for some equipment have become more widespread.
11. The group wanted to produce change that would be systematic (institutionalized) rather than incidental or “tokenistic”. One action that could be undertaken is the adoption of a gender policy in the standards organizations as workplaces, which some of the institutions represented at the meeting already had.
12. Participants thought that reaching parity in some of the standards development committees is a distant objective because of the very limited pool of women available, due to the low number of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and certain other industries.
13. One participant said a possible solution to that problem was to have a gender expert participate in the work of the committees, in a similar capacity as, for example, the representative of consumers. In his country, the “consumer representative” did not necessarily have to be a technical expert in the subject matter of the committee if none were available. As an alternative, another participant said women NGOs could be invited to participate in the work of committees, even if they lacked subject matter expertise.
14. Other participants thought that all members of a technical committee could be mandated to take a gender course. They pointed to the availability of relevant online courses, for example by UN/WOMEN.
15. Using the analytical framework that had been previously introduced, participants engaged in a practical group-work on a standard on protective equipment (PE). PE that is not well adapted to women's morphology could result in: exposing women to hazards, women performing their tasks less effectively, or women not using the equipment. This could affect women's participation in the economic activity: they could be reluctant to take up the job, they could be terminated or not promoted, or the employer – knowing about the limitations of the PE - would hesitate to hire them. The PE needed to take into account not

only morphology but also cultural and psychological aspects, as well as be based on relevant research on the different effects of exposure to toxic substances on men as opposed as on women. Additionally, the standards development process needed to be inclusive, involving not just women but also for example representatives of clothing manufacturers. In general, the adoption of a standard is a corporate decision, or it may be a societal decision if it is a compulsory standard. In some cases, role models could play a role and incentivize the use of PE for example.

16. The following session was devoted to an exchange of existing gender-specific certification schemes. EDGE introduced its certification system for workplace gender equality, AFNOR presented two state labels: France's label *diversité* and label *égalité*, and UNDP its Gender Equality Seal Certification program for the Private Sector. Additionally, the UN/CEFACT work on "Women in trade facilitation" was briefly introduced. All presentations are available online.

17. The closing session discussed next steps for the group. Several proposals for action in the short – medium and long term emerged from the discussion. These have been refined and updated in the subsequent meetings of the group, and are detailed in consolidated form in Section IV of this document.

### 3. Main highlights of the webinar meetings

18. The initiative has held four webinar meetings on May 10, June 12, July 13 and September 15. Participants at the meetings were from Amsterdam Royal Institute (the Netherlands), Association Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie (RFN), ASTM International, British Standards Institution (BSI), DRR Dynamics (United Kingdom), EDGE Certified Foundation (Switzerland), the European Commission, Federation University (Australia), International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), International Gender Champions & Woman@theTable (NGO in Geneva), International Organization for Standardization (ISO), the ISO/TC 68 dealing with financial services, NZ WorkSafe (New Zealand), OSCE Gender Section, Swedish Standards Institute, UNAIDS Secretariat, University of Manchester (United Kingdom) and UNWOMEN.

19. A meeting with participation by UNWOMEN, IEC and ASTM took place on May 4 to look at available training programmes. Participants identified and referred in particular to the following :

- UNWOMEN training programmes including web-based materials available at [trainingcentre.unwomen.org](http://trainingcentre.unwomen.org)
- Gender Based Analysis Plus (CBA+), developed by Canada.

20. These resources were relayed to the wider group at the webinar on 10<sup>th</sup> May. Additionally, at that webinar participants shared some initial data on participation by women in standardization committees. Not all organizations collected sex-disaggregated data in a form that they could publicly share. Overall, organizations reported that participation in standardization activities ranged between 11 and 25%. There were important variations depending on the sector in which the committees worked and on the country of origin of participants. There was not enough data on the percentages of women in senior positions, for example: how many women chair technical committees, or are part of the secretariats of standardization bodies at senior levels. Some participants thought that revealing sex-disaggregated data could be sensitive for some of the delegations at international meetings.

21. Participants observed that these statistics in part reflected the low numbers of women in the "science, technology, engineering, and mathematics" (STEM) field. Actions

to increase women's participation in standardization also included actions (i.e. in the field of education) which were well beyond the scope of the national standards bodies and standards development organizations.

22. Participants then discussed possible actions to increase participation by women in standardization, including: training, coaching for women in junior positions in delegations, programmes for young professionals in national and international standards bodies that would target women professionals, and making public the level of representation by women in national delegations in international meetings.

23. To respond to the discussion concerning data on participation of women in standardization activities, at the webinar meeting on June 12th, the UNECE Secretariat proposed to the group the development of a Data Analytics Visualisation project. This would aim at: gathering, visualizing and monitoring sex-disaggregated data on participation in the activities of national and international standards bodies. Standards bodies operating at national, regional and international level, as well as bodies with different "business models" would all be invited to contribute. The project would deliver not only raw data but also tableau report with multiple facets over the data in order to show certain metrics, those being: gender preference, organisation, sector/industry, hierarchy, age, membership, geographic origin. The project would need to be run on extra-budgetary resources which were being sought.

24. A University Professor informed the group that APEC was developing a "gender analysis guide". The document would be part of a broader gender inclusion project and would include guidelines on how to collect sex-disaggregated data, as well as on positive actions for gender inclusion and gender analysis.

25. At the webinar meeting on July 13<sup>th</sup> the General Secretary of *Association Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie (RNF)* presented a project for French-speaking countries which aims at insuring a better integration of women and girls in the formal economy. The project will focus on standards and quality systems. The first pilots will be under way in Senegal, Madagascar, Cameroon and Burkina Faso and will create a network of women under national standardization bodies offering standards-related training to women.

26. At that same webinar meeting, the NZ Worksafe representative presented analysis of workplace accidents in New Zealand where electricity was involved. The data was disaggregated by sex. Overall, the vast majority of these accidents were to men, as they were more actively participating in the industry. This research was important because it could be used to justify further work on gender-responsive standards if it could be proved that gender biased standards were leading to injuries. Such conclusions would require further analysis.

27. At the webinar on 15<sup>th</sup> September, the ISO Senior Expert on Research and Innovation, speaking on his own behalf, said that the UNECE group should aim at producing at least three deliverables, being: a policy statement directed to standards bodies with the rationale for taking measures towards increasing the participation of women and the degree of gender equity in standards development; a list of criteria or conditions that can be applied during the process of standards development to help standards developers identify and avoid potential gender bias; and a repository of relevant sources and materials to raise awareness on gender issues. He then presented a first draft of the second document – which had been previously distributed to the group. Participants started to discuss the document and decided to appoint a smaller task force to finalize it and report back to the next webinar.

28. The representative of BSI presented a "Draft Charter on Gender Responsive Standards Bodies" which had also been distributed to the Group prior to the meeting. The Draft Charter was intended to help national standards bodies and other standards

development organizations to identify actions that they can take to make standards and the standards development process more gender responsive. The document contained a list of commitments that national, regional or international standards bodies could take and could be signed as a demonstration of their commitment to gender responsiveness. Participants discussed the document and decided to appoint a taskforce to finalize it by the next webinar.

29. The representative of NZ Worksafe made a presentation on “Gender bias in Standardization”. She explained that standards needed to be focused on the impact of the products or processes or equipment being designed for and on people, rather than in the abstract. In other words, standards should be assessed for functionality-as-it-relates-to-people, including women, as well as functionality-as-it-relates-to-process.

30. She then introduced a model that could be used to assess the likelihood and consequence of a standard having a bias against females. The following factors made it more likely for a standard to be biased: the committee membership is not balanced; females are not able to, or are not resourced to participate; no organisations are included that represent females, the consultation process does not have specific consideration of gender bias; there is no verification process for the inclusion of gender issues.

31. Factors that made a bias against women more consequential included: that the standard covered a subject where men and female are physically different; that it relates to a sector dominated by males, that the bias could have a significant outcome (in terms of making it difficult or impossible for women to participate in a given activity).

32. The Group agreed that these factors were relevant starting point for a discussion and that these criteria could be evolved into a tool to identify sectors that should be tackled as a priority.

#### **4. Proposed plan of the work for the Group**

33. The comprehensive consultations described above contribute to raise collective awareness of the importance of mainstreaming gender in standardization policies. As the subject is vast and still very much under researched, the Group has not yet finalized deliverables that it can present to the WP. 6 for decision.

34. The Group has however agreed on a detailed plan of work, which it will progress in the intersessional period. It proposes that it continues to progress on the plan of action, and that it reports back to the WP. 6 plenary in 2018.

35. It is understood that some of the actions included in the plan cannot be realized without financial support in the form of extra-budgetary contributions. The Group and the secretariat will continue to work to raise funds so as to ensure that the action plan could be completed in its entirety, while also delivering on the Action Plan within existing resources.

### **Proposed Action Plan of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative**

1. To develop and adopt a Charter of Gender-Responsive National/Regional/International Standards Bodies; this may be in the form of proposing a selection of alternative commitments and actions that each body could consider. ask for commitment to a set number of those actions as appropriate / applicable / practicable for each organization
2. Explore the possibility of establishing a “International Gender Champions-Impact Group on Standards”, working together with the association Women@TheTable and with the International Gender Champions network
3. Develop a database with sex-disaggregated data on women participation in standardization activities
4. Investigate the possibility of creating Gender Expert Networks for Standards (similar to consumer expert network model); network of people trained as gender experts who can join standards committees specifically to help them identify, analyze and resolve issues of gender bias with the standard and/or which may be created by its implementation
5. Develop a gendered standard as a pilot project: Identify a standard that is being developed and make that standard gender informed;
6. Develop guidance to assess whether standards are gender-biased and to correct gender bias if present:
  - Develop criteria to ascertain whether there exists gender bias in the content and implementation of standards;
  - Propose actions for removing gender bias from standards where it exists and taking measures to avoid introducing gender bias into newly developed standards;
  - Collect evidence of how participation of women in standards setting contributes to improving the quality of standards (irrespective of a gender bias).
7. Assessing the impact of standards on women
  - How do women entrepreneurs use standards?
  - Could women have more opportunities if they used standards more?
  - Is there any inequality/bias as a result of the implementation of a standard?
8. Training materials: Prepare a compilation of existing training materials that could be used by standardization bodies and adapt them as required
9. Continue to exchange best practice on successful projects undertaken by participants to better understand the challenge of mainstreaming gender in standardization, as well as areas of outstanding need.