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Gender-responsive standards initiative

Progress report on the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

In 2016, Working Party 6 created the *Gender Responsive Standards Initiative* with the aim of improving gender balance in standards development, and ensuring that the content and impact of standards, when implemented, are gender-responsive. This document reports on the progress in the work of the Initiative.

Proposed decision:

The Working Party adopts the report on the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative. It requests the Secretariat to continue to report on its development and implementation.

I. Mandate of the Initiative

1. During the 26th Plenary Session of the ECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (Working Party 6), member States agreed to give a mandate to the Bureau and the secretariat to initiate consultations on developing a roadmap and a recommendation on mainstreaming gender into standards and regulatory policies at national and international levels (Decision 4), with particular reference to:

- Enhance the use of standards and technical regulations as tools for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal 5;
- Mainstream a gender perspective in the development and implementation of standards;
- Mainstream a gender perspective in the development and enforcement of technical regulations.

2. These activities are undertaken within the context of the ECE Strategic Framework for the period 2018–2019.¹ Further, the project responds to United Nations Economic and Social Council resolutions no. 2011/5² and no. 2013/16³.

II. Background of the initiative

3. Investing in women's economic empowerment creates exponential growth as well as sets a path towards gender equality, economic independence, and the development of gender-sensitive policy and programs.

4. Whilst many international commitments support women's economic empowerment, the world's female labour participation rate (per cent of female population aged 15+) recently fell to its lowest level since 1990, representing a major hindrance to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

5. In a number of fields, standards represent a subtle yet important barrier to the participation of women in economic sectors that have become *de facto* male-dominated. Additionally, as all products and services are designed to specifications contained in standards, a failure to explicitly analyze the needs of the different genders may result in reduced usability or an increased price of products that would otherwise contribute to freeing up women's time. Such adaptation, were it to be more systematic, would decrease the burden of domestic chores, enabling women who are traditionally responsible for these tasks to seek and retain paid positions in the formal sector or pursue a formal education.

6. The insufficient focus of standardization activities at all levels – sectoral, national, regional and international – on the needs of women can be surmised from two observations:

a) The very small share of women involved in standard-setting activities. ECE has preliminarily estimated that as little as 10 per cent of standards development experts are women. This may affect the way in which standards are produced and the focus of standardization activities more broadly.

¹ “Due consideration will be given to the gender dimension of development. Gender equality and the empowerment of women will be integrated in ECE sub-programs in accordance with the United Nations System-wide Action Plan...the program will focus on women in the economy and promote women's entrepreneurship in the region.”

² “The role of the United Nations system in implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and the empowerment of women.”

³ “Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programs in the United Nations system.”

b) No gender strategy currently exists in the standardization field and none of the major standards setting bodies has:

- Adopted an official gender strategy for the organization of their internal activities;
- Prioritized gender in the planning or adaptation of its standardization activities;
- Developed a tool for the analysis of existing standards through a gender lens.

7. Standards are not only valuable in informing management decisions in business, they are also key components in the development of compulsory instruments, such as regulations, and form the basis for a large range of social and economic policies. As such, the lack of a gender lens in the development of standards is poised to result in gender blind societal choices, which will result in their further exclusion of women and the further decrease in their participation in the workforce.

III. Main achievements of the initiative until 2018

8. In 2016, Working Party 6 created the *Gender Responsive Standards Initiative*, with the aim of improving gender balance in standards development, and of ensuring that the content and impact of standards, when implemented, are gender-responsive.

9. In 2017, the initiative held a first physical meeting in April, followed by five online meetings, where participants exchanged information and best practice. These included presentations on: gender bias in standardisation offered by WorkSafe;⁴ *Gender-Based Analysis Plus* delivered by State of Women Canada;⁵ a certification system for workplace gender equality provided by EDGE;⁶ two state labels introduced by AFNOR;⁷ the *Gender Equality Seal Certification Program* for the Private Sector from UNDP;⁸ training materials and tools on gender mainstreaming offered by UN Women Training Centre;⁹ a project by the Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie aimed at ensuring better integration of women and girls into the formal economy through the usage and uptake of standards;¹⁰ and a tool developed by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to analyse gender implications of technical regulations (APEC's Guide on Gender Analysis¹¹).

10. Participants also started work on the Recommendation on *Gender-Responsive Standards*, which was finalized in the following reporting period.

⁴ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/NZ_Worksafe_Gender_Bias_in_Standardization_V2.pdf.

⁵ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/SWC-CFC-PRESENTATION_UNECE_general_overview_GBA_training_and_tools_Oct_23_2017.pdf.

⁶ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/documents/2017/Gender/EDGE_VFinal.pdf.

⁷ <https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/documents/2017/Gender/AFNOR.pdf>.

⁸ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/documents/2017/Gender/UNDP_PPT_Analysis_of_Standards_through_a_Gender_Lengths.pdf.

⁹ [trainingcentre.unwomen.org](https://www.trainingcentre.unwomen.org).

¹⁰ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/Projet_FJN_RNF_description_sommaire_19_cellules_EN.PDF.

¹¹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/APEC_Gender_Inclusion_Guidelines.pdf

IV. Activities of the initiative in 2018 and deliverables for the annual session

11. In 2018, the initiative held four meetings on 25 January, 26 March, 27 April and 8 June. The main action item for these online meetings was the development and finalization of the *Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards*. This Declaration is embedded in a Recommendation contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2018/6 submitted separately for approval at this session.

12. Conditional upon the Recommendation's approval, the Declaration will be opened for signature. The document seeks to support national and international standards bodies and standards developing organizations in identifying actions that they can undertake to:

- a) Support the increased participation of women in standard setting activities;
- b) Review existing standards to ensure that they are not gender biased;
- c) Develop a methodology to ensure that standards under development are gender responsive.

13. These meetings were also the occasion for the exchange of best practice among participants. This included presentations on: the *Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD)* Database from the International Trade Centre, aimed at assisting enterprises, governments as well as other organizations and institutions in analysing and dealing with diverse voluntary sustainable standards;¹² the *Gender Inclusion Guidelines* developed by APEC, whose purpose is promoting gender integration in all fora and committees across the organization, while aiming at progressing gender-related expertise in all APEC work areas;¹³ and the *Equal Wage Management System Standard* IST 185 introduced by Iceland, with the aim of creating a system that would ensure equality in payment and working conditions of both men and women working for the same employer¹⁴.

14. The visibility of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative has been steadily increasing over the past two years at the international level. This is confirmed by:

a) The International Gender Champions 2017 Annual Report featured the initiative to mainstream gender into its core activities and referred to the *Pledge for Action on Gender-Responsive Standards* as a document containing examples of commitments standard-setting bodies can make.

b) In March 2018, the American Society for Testing and Materials published a special-themed issue of its magazine, *Standardization News*, devoted to Women in Standards, and featuring an interview of the Secretary of Working Party 6.

c) At the June 2018 meeting of the World Trade Organization's Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, the Canadian delegation, as part of their *Progressive Trade Agenda*, submitted a recommendation that the Eight Triennial Review include a workshop or thematic session on the role of gender in the development of standards and technical regulations. The objective of such a workshop or thematic session would be to encourage an exchange of experiences among standards development organizations, and to discuss ongoing initiatives to achieve gender equality in standard setting.

¹² https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/ITC_T4SD_Overview_Gender_related_standards_25.01.pdf.

¹³ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/APEC_Gender_Inclusion_Guidelines.pdf.

¹⁴ http://www.kvenrettindafelag.is/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/The-Equal-Pay-Standard-%C3%8DST-85-www.vel_is_.pdf.

V. Responsibility for the continuation of the work

15. The Gender Responsive Standards initiative is serviced by the ECE secretariat, in cooperation with Ms. Stephanie Eynon, Standards-Makers Development and Engagement Manager, British Standards Institute and Ms. Caitlin Kraft-Buchman, co-founder, International Gender Champions.

VI. Role of the secretariat

16. The sectoral initiative invites Working Party 6 to request the secretariat to continue to support the work of the initiative by fundraising for awareness-raising and capacity-building activities; servicing the meetings of the Initiative and keeping the website up to date. Contingent upon the availability of extrabudgetary resources the secretariat could assist in further promoting the importance of Gender-Responsive Standards to standards bodies, national Governments and regional groups and participating in awareness-raising and capacity-building activities.
