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**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)**

**Economic Cooperation and Trade Division**

**Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)**

Geneva, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## **Re-Tooling for Sustainability**

Held via WebEx

## A) Opening Meeting

1. The Director of UNECE's Economic Cooperation and Trade Department opened the meeting. She welcomed attendees, offered a brief introduction and extended thanks to UN staff for their flexibility and commitment to convening meetings, throughout the global health crisis.
2. The Moderator, in her opening remarks, noted the pertinence of the topic. She briefly introduced UNECE WP.6's activities on "Standards for the SDGs" making reference to the [portal "Standards for the SDGs"](#) and the UNECE [Gender Responsive Standards Declaration](#).

## B) Welcome Address

3. The Executive Secretary of UNECE highlighted the role of standards as instruments to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the need to retool organizations through multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration. Standards are not only shared solutions to societal challenges, but also mechanisms of accountability. To pursue their use for sustainable outcomes, she stressed, standards development and implementation need to become more inclusive. She concluded by calling on all participants to embrace partnerships which accelerate innovation and harness solutions which ensure lasting change for women and girls.
4. The Regional Director (Europe and Central Asia) of UN Women expressed her solidarity with those engaged in the prevention and treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic. She expressed her organization's continued support for the UNECE-led Gender Responsive Standards Initiative. She said standards are needed to back the investments required for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for action, as well as for emergency response to and recovery from crises like COVID-19. Making these standards gender responsive will ensure nobody is left behind, and better overall results are achieved. She concluded by highlighting the importance of gender responsive budgeting, and the key role standards play in to achieve this outcome.

## C) Panel Session One

5. The first panellist, the Standards-Markers Engagement & Inclusion Manager of the British Standards Institution (BSI), started her remarks by underscoring the importance of gender responsive standards for sustainable development. As a signatory to the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development, BSI has committed to making its standards, and standards-developing activities, gender equal. She noted that BSI brings together 13,000 individual standards makers across 1,200 committees, of which 20% are women. In her dual capacity as Chair of UNECE's Gender Responsive Standards Initiative and BSI Standards-Markers Engagement & Inclusion Manager, the speaker discussed the history of the ECE Initiative and the activities which led to the creation of the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development. In this regard, it is crucial

that standards developers make the right tools available (e.g. for gender-based analysis), make gender-responsiveness an imperative and strive for adjustability instead of ‘gender-neutral’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’.

6. The second panellist, the State Advisor for Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, North Macedonia, opened her presentation (‘Standards for Women’s Empowerment in Rural Communities’) with discussion on the importance of agriculture to North Macedonia. The speaker noted the disproportionate representation of women farmers in the agricultural sector (22% of the agricultural sector) and outlined the numerous challenges (e.g. access to finance, access to resource and the existence of gender stereotypes) encountered by women-led agribusinesses. To mitigate these barriers to economic inclusion, the Ministry of Agriculture and Economy for North Macedonia introduced two initiatives which support women’s economic empowerment and participation. The Ministry made standards for agricultural production gender responsive and, for the first time, introduced policy measures that provided financial support to women farmers and their businesses.

### **D) Session One: Question & Answer**

7. The Moderator opened the Question & Answer session by posing the following question: is there any discussion on including gender responsiveness to private-sector standards (e.g. financial sector)? The representative of BSI explained that the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development is open to all standards developing organizations.

### **E) Panel Session Two: Standards for the SDGs: Developing and Implementing an SDG Toolbox**

8. The Secretary of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) assumed the role of Moderator of the remainder of the event. She underscored the importance of standards in the prevention and treatment of COVID-19 and referred participants to the UNECE portal on ‘Standards for the SDGs’, as an important instrument in strengthening knowledge on the use of standards for sustainable outcomes.
9. The first panellist, Chief of the Study Groups Department of the Telecommunications Standardization Bureau at ITU, explained that ITU takes a broad view of standards and women across three dimensions. The first dimension includes standards development promoting female leadership. In regard to this greater prioritisation, he highlighted ITU’s Bridging the Standardization Gap fellowship programme and the activities of the World Telecom Assembly, which has delivered several presentations on the topic of gender responsive standards development. The second dimension involves the career development of women in ITU’s standardization works. The final dimension relates to ITU’s output, including for example smart city standards focussing on gender participation in e-waste management and the creation of greater financial inclusivity.
10. The second panellist, the Director of Government Relations at the Deutsche Institut für Normung e.V. (Standards Body of Germany), presented the Joint Initiative for Standardization (JIS), undertaken to raise awareness of the contribution of standards to the

European single market. The Joint Initiative on Standardisation sets out a shared vision for European standardisation in order to ensure the prioritisation and modernisation of the current European standardisation system. The speaker referenced various actions established by the Initiative and presented examples of the Initiative's success. She recalled the fruitful cooperation with UNECE, in particular: the JIS had used as a template for its collection of case studies the model developed by UNECE for the "Standards for the SDGs" portal and had contributed 8 case studies to the portal. She then focussed on one example of how standards support the achievement of the SDGs: Germany had supported the implementation of international standard (ISO 50001) to improve energy efficiency for energy intensive industries through tax reductions, which raised public awareness and led to substantial progress.

11. The third panellist, the Executive Director of the European Environmental Citizens' Organization for Standardization (ECOS), highlighted the important role of standardisation in the transition to a clean and circular economy, which respects planetary boundaries, and called for greater alignment with the SDGs. Standards facilitate the development of climate-friendly technologies (e.g. natural refrigerants, electric vehicles) and enable such products to access to the market. The speaker showcased his organisation's work to identify and focus attention on unintended, harmful effects of certain standards and barriers to gender balanced participation in standards development (e.g. access to information, prohibitive costs, poor understanding). He concluded the presentation by presenting the positive impact of greater inclusivity in standards, which includes higher quality standards, greater legitimacy and the support of external watchdogs for misuse.

### **F) Session Two: Question & Answer**

12. The Moderator opened the floor to questions. The following was put to the panel: what policy interventions are needed to support standards? The representative of BSI responded that governments and firms may use standards and noted that standards should be supported by laws (i.e. gender-based violence). The representative of DIN discussed how the implementation of standards in political strategies, can encourage the greater participation of public authorities in the creation of standards.

### **G) Closing Remarks**

13. The Secretary of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) thanked attendees for their participation and contribution to the meeting. The next meeting of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative, scheduled for April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020, will provide an opportunity to further discuss the potential of standards for the realization of gender equality. She concluded by calling for a shared strategy to leverage the respective strengths of UNECE and UN Women, and accelerate the contribution of standards to the empowerment of women and girls.