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Item 7 of the provisional agenda

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 commends the opening of the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards for signature. It encourages Member States to engage in dialogue with standards bodies in their jurisdiction, so they also become signatories. It further requests the Secretariat to continue its awareness-raising efforts and to report on activities at the next session.

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:

GE.19-15574(E)



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- 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; and
- Mainstream a gender perspective in the development and enforcement of technical regulations.

2. The activities were undertaken within the context of the ECE Strategic Framework for the period 2016-2017 and 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+) stood at only 48.5% in 2018 – 26.5% below that of men. Since 1990, the participation gap has narrowed by only 2%, representing a major hindrance to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁴

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 analyse 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; and

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

(i) Adopted an official gender strategy for the organization of their internal activities;

¹ See documents A/69/6 and A71/6 available at <https://www.unece.org/info/open-unece/programme-planning-and-reporting.html> in particular as regards para 17 “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.”

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.”

⁴ See : International Labour Organization, ILO, “World Employment Social Outlook 2018”.

- (ii) Prioritized gender in the planning or adaptation of its standardization activities; and
- (iii) 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 used as precursors in the development of 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 2019

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, followed by five online meetings, where participants exchanged information and best practice. These included presentations on: gender bias in standardisation offered by WorkSafe;⁵ Gender-Based Analysis Plus delivered by State of Women Canada;⁶ a certification system for workplace gender equality provided by EDGE;⁷ two state labels introduced by AFNOR;⁸ the Gender Equality Seal Certification Program for the Private Sector from UNDP⁹, training materials and tools on gender mainstreaming offered by UN Women Training Centre;¹⁰ 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;¹¹ and a tool developed by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to analyse gender implications of technical regulations (APEC's Guide on Gender Analysis¹²).

10. In 2018, the initiative held four online meetings and one physical meeting resulting in the finalization of the Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards. This Declaration was embedded in the Recommendation U which was unanimously approved and adopted at the Twenty-Eight session of the Working Party in November 2018.

11. The online 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

⁵ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/NZ_Worksafe_Gender_Bias_in_Standardization_V2.pdf.

⁶ 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.

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

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

⁹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/documents/2017/Gender/UNDP_PPT_Analysis_of_Standards_through_a_Gender_Lengths.pdf.

¹⁰ trainingcentre.unwomen.org.

¹¹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/Projet_FJN_RNF_description_sommaire_19_cellules_EN.PDF.

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

diverse voluntary sustainable standards;¹³ 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;¹⁴ 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 employer¹⁵.

12. Finally, the Secretariat worked with a number of partners to increase the visibility of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative resulting in coverage in the International Gender Champions 2017 Annual Report, in the ASTM International magazine, *Standardization News*, among others.

IV. Activities of the initiative in 2019, deliverables for the annual session, and plans for 2020

13. The main achievement of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative in the current reporting period was the successful opening of the Declaration for signature on 14 May 2019 56 organizations signed the Declaration on the day of the opening itself. The event was broadcast live on UN TV and actively promoted in Twitter and Facebook. It was held as a no-fly event to limit carbon emissions and limit adverse impacts on climate.

14. The high number of signatories was achieved in no small part thanks to an intense and wide-reaching information campaign on “Gender Responsive Standards” which used traditional and social media and direct contacts reaching an estimated total of over 5 million people globally. This was made possible by the use of funds from the project ““Enhancing usage and uptake of the standards for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals”¹⁶

15. Current signatories include international organizations: ISO, IEC, ITU, regional organizations: CEN/CENELEC, the African Organization for Standardization (ARSO), as well as 46 national standards bodies and other organizations. The list of signatories as of 17 September 2019 is provided in Annex 1.

16. Additional deliverables under the initiative include:

(a) The publication of a volume on Gender Responsive Standards which makes the case for mainstreaming gender in the development and implementation of standards. It includes three chapters respectively discussing: the role of standards as a way of furthering equal participation by both genders in economic decision-making; the inclusion of a gender perspective in voluntary sustainability Standards (VSS), and the impact of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures on women. It additionally lays out recommendations for action aimed at standards bodies, international organizations, and governments

(b) Two promotional videos:

(i) an animation video aimed at raising awareness about the importance of increasing women participation in standardization as an indispensable

¹³ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/ITC_T4SD_Overview_Gender_related_standards_25.01.pdf.

¹⁴ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/presentations/APEC_Gender_Inclusion_Guidelines.pdf.

¹⁵ http://www.kvenrettindafelag.is/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/The-Equal-Pay-Standard-%C3%8DST-85-www.vel_is_.pdf.

¹⁶ The project was carried out by the UNECE Secretariat from July 2018 to July 2019 thanks to contributions by the German Cooperation fund through the Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB) as well as ASTM international and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE).

foundation for the inclusiveness and relevance of standards, especially for sustainability (available on YouTube <https://youtu.be/4I-PKQOAGxM>)

(ii) a video reviewing the key moments of the ceremony of the opening of the Declaration for signature and of the lead up to the event. (under development at the moment of drafting).

17. Further, on 17 September 2019, the First Meeting of the Signatories of the Declaration was held in Cape Town, South Africa. The meeting provided a space for signatories to:

- exchange their experiences in developing gender action plans and implementing initiatives for women empowerment in their specific contexts;
- deciding the future priorities of the Initiative based on current and newly proposed work items (e.g. collect examples of gender-blind standards, support twinning among standards bodies, organize/participate in awareness-raising events; develop methodologies to record participation broken down by sex and to ensure standards.

18. A total of 52 experts from 36 organizations participated in the meeting, which was preceded by an online survey to determine the priorities of the partners. A detailed oral report about the meeting will be given by the Secretariat at the 29th Session of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies session

19. In addition to the two high-level events described above, the initiative held three webinar meetings in January, April and June. The webinars focussed on the following: the translation of the Declaration in both UN official languages and other languages; presentations of research outputs by academics; discussions on the experience of signatories in developing and implementing the Declaration and planning for events and meetings.

20. Additionally, an important event planned in the next reporting period is a workshop the role of gender in the development of standards and technical regulations that is scheduled to be held in November 2020 in conjunction with the meeting of the World Trade Organization's Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, upon the initiative of the Canadian WTO delegation. The UNECE secretariat will continue to cooperate closely with Canada in view of featuring the Declaration at this important event.

V. Responsibility for the continuation of the work

21. 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

22. 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.

Annex

List of signatories of the Declaration

Regional/ international standards bodies/voluntary sustainability standards bodies

African Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO)
AMFORI
ASTM International
European Committee for Standardization (CEN) &
European Committee for Electrotechnical
Standardization (CENELEC)

International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)
International Organization for Standardization (ISO)
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Round Table Responsible Soy (RTRS)
The Gold Standard
Verra

National standards bodies

General Directorate of Standardization, Albania
Austrian Standards International, Austria
Instituto Boliviano de Normalización y Calidad,
Bolivia
Standards Council of Canada, Canada
Instituto Colombiano de Normas Técnicas y
Certificación, Colombia
Office Congolais de Contrôle, Congo
Organisation for Standardisation, Cyprus
Danish Standards, Denmark
Instituto Dominicano para la Calidad, Dominican
Republic
Servicio Ecuatoriano de Normalización, Ecuador
The Gambia Standards Bureau, Gambia
Deutsches Institut für Normung, Germany
Organismo Hondureño de Normalización, Honduras
Icelandic Standards, Iceland
Bureau of Indian Standards, India
National Standards Authority of Ireland, Ireland
Comitato Elettrotecnico Italiano, Italy
Ente Italiano di Normazione, Italy
Latvian Standard, Latvia
Lithuanian Standards Board, Lithuania
Institut Luxembourgeois de la Normalisation, de
l'Accréditation, de la Sécurité et qualité des produits et
services, Luxembourg
Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority,
Malta

Mauritius Standards Bureau, Mauritius
Dirección General de Normas, Mexico
Institute for Standardization of Moldova, Moldova
Institut Marocain de Normalisation, Morocco
Instituto Nacional de Normalização e Qualidade,
Mozambique
NEN, the Netherlands Standardization Institute
NEC, the Netherlands Electrotechnical Committee
Standards New Zealand, New Zealand
IEC National Committee of New Zealand, New
Zealand
Instituto Português da Qualidade, Portugal
Saint Kitts and Nevis Bureau of Standards, Saint Kitts
and Nevis
Saint Lucia Bureau of Standards, Saint Lucia
Association Sénégalaise de Normalisation, Senegal
Sierra Leone Standards Bureau, Sierra Leone
Asociación Española de Normalización, Spain
Swedish Institute for Standards, Sweden
Swiss Association for Standardization, Switzerland
Thai Industrial Standards Institute, Thailand
Bureau of Standards, Trinidad and Tobago
Agence Togolaise de Normalisation, Togo
Türk Standardlari Enstitüsü, Turkey
British Standards Institution, United Kingdom of Great
Britain and Northern Ireland
Instituto Uruguayo de Normas Técnicas, Uruguay