Meeting Report

Annual Session of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI)
Geneva, 08 June 2022

Report of the Annual Session of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (08 June 2022)

I. Introduction

1. The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) held the Annual Session of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) on 08 June 2022, from 10:00 AM – 17:00PM (CEST).

2. Experts from the following United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) member States attended: Albania, Austria, Canada, Cyprus, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Moldova, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America (USA), and Uzbekistan. Experts from the following non-ECE member States attended Australia, Barbados, Benin, Cameroon, Ecuador, Guyana, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Thailand, and Uruguay.

3. The following United Nations bodies and international organizations participated: the Eurasian Economic Commission, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Commission, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). The following inter- and non-governmental organizations participated: American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), ASTM International, the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC), the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) and the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO).

4. Participants also included representatives of private sector companies, associations, academia, and civil society organizations from various United Nations regions.

II. Approval of the agenda (Item 1a)

5. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative presented the agenda, which was adopted without amendment. Participants were encouraged to make contributions toward the discussion, via the online chat function, and report their activities in Item 4a 'Other Business'.

III. Brief introductions (Item 2a)

6. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative outlined the structure of Session 1 and encouraged participants to pose questions and give insight on the current/future activities and Best Practice Template.

IV. Reporting on activities during the current period (Item 2b)

7. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) presented the sections of the WP.6 Programme of Work 2021-22 relevant to the GRSI and invited participants to discuss their respective achievement. The speaker provided further

information on the activities undertaken by the secretariat in areas such as signatory surveys, supportive training material and assessment methodology.

8. A representative of the secretariat drew attention to the capacity-building workshops delivered by WP.6. The four sessions (April 26th, April 27th, May 3rd and May 4th) had in excess of 280 registrants, representing over 80 countries. The workshops were delivered in English and French with one workshop featuring Russian interpretation. This represented a first collaboration with several national standards bodies (NSBs). The workshops lent space to standards experts to present the work of their organisation and discuss best practice tools and innovative work, undertaken to advance gender equality.

9. A representative of Federation University Australia congratulated the Initiative on achieving the activities set out in the WP.6 2021-2022 Programme of Work. The speaker emphasised the need for evaluation of the activities and queried whether the workshop evaluation was available.

10. The representative of the secretariat supported the need for evaluation and noted that the evaluation report was available on the workshop event page. A link to the evaluation report was provided.

11. The representative of Le Réseau Normalisation et Francophonie (RNF) highlighted how the organisation has created Cells of youth and women in 6 countries in Africa, in collaboration with the NSBs in these countries. The speaker cited Cellules Jeunes Femmes et Normalisation as a concrete example of this work and offered to provide further information at a later meeting.

V. Proposed activities for the coming period (Item 2c)

12. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) presented action areas for participants to consider for the WP.6 Programme of Work 2022-23. The speaker highlighted the need for **continued capacity-building and proposed work in areas, including: the signatory network, provision of training, best practice events and access to GRSI resources in the digital realm.**

13. The representative of UN Women drew attention to the on-going collaboration between the organisations. The speaker noted the success of recent engagements, including the RFSD Roundtable ('Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic', April 7th), at which GRSI was granted a panel role. The GRSI representative discussed the important role of standards in shaping solutions to the structural inequalities, made ever clearer by the impacts of the health crisis.

14. The representative of UN Women expressed interest in **strengthening this collaboration** and noted the wealth of gender-related training material available on the UN Women Training Centre portal.

15. The representative of the Jordan Standards and Metrology Organisation (JSMO) queried whether it would be possible for **trainings on gender-responsive standards to be delivered in Arabic**. In addition, the speaker noted that an Arabic translation of GRSI reports would be of great benefit.

16. The Secretary of Working Party welcomed this proposal, noting that the WP.6 is looking to raise funds to have content translated to all official languages of the UN (including Arabic). He further explained that WP.6 is exploring possibilities of doing capacity building with the other regional UN bodies. However, this depends currently on extra-budgetary funds.

VI. Update on Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards report (Item 3a)

17. The Lead of GRSI Project Team 2 on Gender-Responsive Standards Methodology (GRSI PT2) presented the (advanced copy) "Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards", which presents practical steps to address gender inequality in standardization policy and standards development processes. Developed by a team of standards and gender experts, the report considers aspects of inclusive recruitment, balanced representation, and unconscious bias.

18. The Lead of GRSI PT2 further noted that the consultation period had concluded on 31 May 2022, with comments received from representatives of: the British Standards Institution (BSI); the Bureau de normalisation du Québec (BNQ); CEN and CENELEC; the European Commission; Federation University Australia; and the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC). These comments were consolidated at a meeting of Project Team 2 (2 June 2022). The final version of the Guidelines was endorsed during this meeting and proposed to be presented to the WP.6 annual session in November for final approval.

VII. Standards developing organisation (SDO) best practice (Item 3b)

19. A representative of the secretariat explained how the **Best Practice Template** would support standards developing organisations to communicate the intricacies of their gender strategy/gender action plan in a uniform manner. The template complements the repository of Standards for SDGs-related case studies, which demonstrate the importance of standards as instruments for sustainable development.

20. The representative of the secretariat further noted how the template would abstract critical elements of gender action plan, including: evaluation criteria, frequency of evaluation, funding sources, longevity of funding/resource constraint, institutional buy-in and specific activities undertaken to support the participation of women in technical committees. It was noted that the template would be circulated to the GRSI leadership for comments, before being disseminated to the wider group for use.

21. The Secretary of Working Party 6 (WP.6) drew attention to the need for a uniform template and emphasised how it enabled standards developing organisations to target specific areas of interest.

22. The Secretary of WP.6 detailed the process of formalising the initiative into a Team of Specialists, which included a terms of reference (ToR) being presented to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standardization (the parent-body of WP.6). He explained that if the proposal is accepted by the member States of the Steering Committee, it would then move to the Executive Committee of UNECE, which would validate the request to form the Team of Specialists.

IX. Other business (Item 4a)

23. The representative of the Standards & Metrology Institute for the Islamic States (SMIIC) presented the organisation's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2030. The speaker discussed how gender equality had been integrated into the organisation's work and highlighted Objective 1.2 (Improve the Standardization Process), where 'women's participation in the standards development process' is a key performance indicator.

24. The representative of the British Standards Institution (BSI) highlighted their work on increasing women's participation in standards development. The speaker noted how BSI is actively engaging new members to discover barriers to participation. Issues identified by BSI include the work's voluntary nature, awareness of the opportunity,

transparency, and the consistency of the process. In light of these findings, BSI has looked to transform how it recruits to Technical Committees, with particular emphasis on diversity and inclusion in the standards development process. To support colleagues, the organisation developed guidance material, on key elements such as identifying stakeholder organisations which may nominate representatives onto technical committees.

25. The representative of New Zealand Work Safe administration noted that there is difficulty to find the correct expertise among women participants for certain technical committees. They have developed an alternative approach to ensure that the needs of women are taken into consideration. [NEED TO PROVIDE A FEW DETAILS ON THIS].

26. The representative of the European Commission **recommended the development of a slide deck, which could be utilised by speakers looking to promote the work of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative.** These slides would include telling examples and a list of resources developed by UNECE on the topic. This would enable experts to convey the work and activities of the GRSI in a clear and uniform way.

27. The representative of ASTM International discussed their adoption of an inclusive strategies perspective. By adopting the diversity, equity and inclusion strategy, the organisation enables Technical Committees to discuss the topic, and consider what mix of strategies best meet their respective needs – especially, within their industry and committee culture. The speaker noted how the strategy has led to the cultivation of grassroots development of women's networks. The bottom-up approach has enabled the members – especially women leaders – to determine how they can create opportunities for themselves, the work then being supported by the organisation through its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and inclusiveness strategies.

X. Session 2 Introduction

28. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) welcomed participants to Session 2, entitled "Gender, digitalisation, the environment: ensuring a sustainable future for all". The speaker outlined the structure of the session – i.e., 3 panels of 4 speakers, with each given 10 mins to present, proceeded by 20 minutes of discussion – and encouraged participants to place questions in the chat box or pose a question during the Q&A segments.

XI. Panel 1: Setting the scene: the intersection of standards with gender, digitalisation, and the environment

29. The lead author of UNDP's guidance "Gender Equality in Digitalisation" presented the relationship between digital technologies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was noted that digitalisation and digital technologies hold immense potential as key enablers of women's empowerment. However, adverse social norms, cultural stereotypes, and gender bias, can prevent women and girls from leveraging digital technologies and undermine their rights and online safety. The speaker presented national and sub-regional data from UNECE member States, which demonstrated the key barriers faced by women and girls. It was noted that data should be presented and collected in a gender-disaggregated manner and reflect gender issues. The speaker proposed a series of action to mitigate these impediments, including enhancing women's active participation in the development and implementation of digital strategies and standards.

30. The representative of Dataskydd.net discussed the relationship between low-level technology standards and the malicious use of digital technologies, such as geo-location services. When used appropriately, geolocation makes it possible for users to

obtain information in real time and locate their intended destination. The same types of standards and technologies which facilitate this form of service provision, or enable people to recover lost devices, underpin products and services which can enable stalkers to track users. Large technology companies are trying to ensure that their geo-location technologies cannot be used in a way that is unintended for the device owner. The speaker noted that, in answer to the environmental message, many hardware firms are focusing on power save mechanisms (i.e., how can we get devices to give the same amount of functionality at lower power use) and it now constitutes one of the industry's primary areas of research.

31. The representative of the Environmental Coalition on Standards (ECOS) explained the key role of standards in linking gender, digitalisation, and the environment. The speaker presented the work of the organisation, the engagement with ISO and IEC, and the importance of a strong environmental voice in the development of standards, at all levels. It was acknowledged that standards were historically the preserve of men, and the speaker underscored the organisation's commitment to inclusive and diverse participation. While new technologies support remote access to the standards development process, face to face interaction remained important too.

32. The representative of ASTM International introduced the organisation, underscoring its role as an independent partner for global standards and testing programmes, which help to answer complex challenges by improving products and environmental outcomes. She discussed the importance of regulatory cooperation and the need to promote global regulatory convergence. It was noted that ASTM International is a signatory of the UNECE Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development and is working towards gender-inclusive processes, the organisation is increasingly using digital platforms to support the active and effective participation of women in standards development. The application of digital technologies and the Guidelines of the GRSI, will help to create a more inclusive standards strategy.

33. The Coordinator thanked panellists for their inputs and requested comments and questions from participants.

34. The representative of ECOS highlighted the challenges related to participation and inclusiveness but noted the presence of new allies which bring new insight and perspective. In the field of new energy, the speaker pointed to the recent purchase of indigenous lands in Australia and noted the need for further information on using the land in a respectful way. It was noted that these new situations and futures intersect with the work of human rights defenders, and in doing so, take standards into contact with entirely new stakeholder groups. The speaker concluded by calling on everyone to realise and explore these new intersections.

35. The representative of Dataskydd.net commented that, in regard to resource extraction and how companies work as commercial entities, it is critical that standards are encoded in a regulatory framework. Beyond that, standards must have adequate enforcement mechanisms, oversight authorities, and regulatory bodies capable of understanding how a company must act to comply.

XII. Panel 2: Closing the digital divide: how standards can strengthen digital literacy and improve access to digital technologies

36. The representative of Maynooth University discussed the need to ensure access to digital technologies for women of all backgrounds. Drawing attention to the social and economic impacts of the pandemic, the speaker highlighted the rolling back of progress and the need to adopt a concerted digital strategy to increase social mobility. The speaker outlined the different facets of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Passport for Inclusion, which aims to increase the digital literacy of

women and girls. The innovative skills programme provides targeted mentoring sessions, a credit module, and on-site lab visits. It was noted that this concerted approach to women's inclusion in STEM has parallels with efforts being discussed on increasing women's participation in standards development activities.

37. The representative of Airbus North America discussed the absence of women in innovation organisations, noting that only 25% of top innovation firms are led by women. The speaker explained that standards can support innovation managers through the sharing of good practices and language. Further, standards make innovation management visible, supporting greater professionalisation over time in project management, quality management and innovation management. The speaker discussed the urgent need for women's involvement in standardization roles.

38. The founder of Hypatia Learning detailed the important role of standards to increase access to education, making it more affordable to all. The speaker discussed how digital technology supports the different preferences and needs of individuals in education. The speaker stressed that education is at the heart of every Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), and because of this, digital technology is a critical enabler of progress, capable of expanding opportunity. To adequately deliver unique, adaptive solutions, it is crucial that the standards which underpin these technologies are gender-responsive. To this point, the speaker called for balanced participation in standards development, to ensure the efficacy of the standards to better meet the needs of everyone in society.

39. The representative of Arizona State University and IEEE Working Group 2089-2021 discussed strengthening digital literacy and improving access to new technologies, with a focus on age-appropriate digital services. The speaker underscored the importance of human-centred design in digital technologies. The human-centred approach requires a concerted design methodology being employed, including facets of participatory design or co-design. Citing the standard IEEE 2089-2021, the speaker highlighted the critical need for establishing requirements for inclusion of appropriate and accountable stakeholders, with clearly defined processes. Further, the speaker notes that the standard constitutes an inspired benchmark for those developing standards and looking to ensure greater inclusion of stakeholders.

40. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI) thanked panellists for their inputs and requested comments and questions from participants.

41. The founder of Hypatia Learning underscored the need for gender to be discussed in standardization. To this point, he noted that in his twenty-year experience of technical committees, the discussion of gender equality in standards has been largely absent. The speaker called for this gap to be addressed and welcomed the work of the Initiative.

42. The representative of Maynooth University discussed how women could be better supported to engage in standardization and challenged the common assertion that women failed to volunteer for technical committees. The speaker put the question to meeting participants.

43. The founder of Hypatia Learning agreed, noting the importance of different perspectives in the standardization process. He agreed that it is critical that women are supported to participate and put forward their needs and insights. The importance of an inclusive, representative standards process was underscored.

44. The representative of ASTM International noted that it was management who put forward representatives to technical committees, and the importance that women and minority stakeholders are at the table. The speaker discussed the importance of supporting future standards professionals on the right ways to engage managers to ensure they are represented in standards opportunities. It was noted that people, once they are afforded the opportunity, must be afforded the correct onboarding and mentoring opportunities, to ensure their effective participation.

45. The Coordinator of the Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative discussed the need to provide women and minority stakeholders with the tools and research to support their

inclusion in technical committees. The speaker further highlighted research by Standards Council of Canada (SCC) which found that employers were less likely to encourage or volunteer women for positions in standards development. There are numerous challenges for standards to be gender-responsive.

XIII. Panel 3: Gender bias in advanced technologies: the important role of standards in reshaping the digital future for all

46. The representative of Trade X and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) presented the data supply chain, noting the place of data at the heart of emerging technology innovations, especially in the domain of artificial intelligence (AI). Visualised as a linear chain, the data supply chain/network is an interconnected system, akin to a decentralised network of data. With appropriate coordination between governance and operational layers, it is possible to define common data sharing governance models, common access models, shared terminology. This alignment between layers is crucial to ensure that bias is not hardwired into the system. The speaker further discussed the SCC's Data Governance Standardisation Collaborative which seeks to – amongst other things – identify bias and, where necessary, manage that bias.

47. The speaker urged countries to classify data as a national asset, putting in place the appropriate systems to harness and protect these assets. Through the promotion of standards, strategies, and frameworks, it is possible to build trust in digital systems and nations. Data is at the core of future economic growth and it essential that countries question what interoperable data trust infrastructure looks like. The speaker discussed the importance of building a system that embodies diversity and equity and noted how globally impactful this would be.

48. The representative of Opendata.ch discussed the impact of bias digitalisation and highlighted several examples of negative implications of encoded gender biases in new technologies. To demonstrate the critical nature of this, the speaker first discussed internet usage (time spent per day on the internet) and explained how digitalisation is not simply a technological issue, but also a societal one. It was noted that discrimination is intersectional, encompassing – among other elements – gender, race and class.

49. The representative discussed how digitalisation impacts perception, impacting notions of beauty and appropriate societal behaviour. Encoded bias brings gaps in our awareness, and it is critical that we identify data gaps and algorithmic bias in new technologies. Bias in product design (e.g., crash test dummies) can have real-world health risks for women and girls, while the use of AI in employment screening processes can serve to exclude women from job opportunities – simply by virtue of their gender. Further encoded bias in new technologies can result in lost knowledge and lack of representation. The speaker concluded by calling for data-centred action, highlighting the important role of transparency, balanced participation, and new standards to correct bias in digitalisation.

50. The representative of Keele University and Women Leading in AI presented her experience as a women involved in standards development and standardization. The speaker discussed her initial experience working on IEEE standards related to algorithmic bias, before progressing to ISO/IEC SC 42 and BS AMMI 34971 (BS AAMI 34971 Guidance on the Application of ISO 14971 to Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning). She emphasised the need for first-time participants to disentangle jargon, make sense of complex processes and demonstrate the value of your involvement to your employers. The speaker noted that standardisation was political and vested interest in the development process can create challenges. She called for the greater representation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), human rights

groups and minority stakeholders. In the absence of AI-specific laws, bias can go unchallenged in algorithmic systems.

51. The speaker underscored the gender imbalance in standardisation activities and impact male-dominated technical committees have on women's participation and recognition of gender inequality. She noted the need to argue for greater awareness of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), in addition to encouraging sponsorship to support greater representation and meaningful engagement of stakeholders in standards development. For standards to address gender bias in algorithmic systems, they must address bias in their own systems, including a redress of the gendered language and terms commonly employed.

52. The representative of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) presenting a brief overview of her respective role and experience, IEC support of gender-related initiatives and the collaborative work of the organisation to identify gender bias. As technical officer at IEC, the speaker noted the importance of increasing women's involvement in standardisation activities and discussed her engagement with groups supporting this shared aim. She highlighted the importance of transparency and the open process, consensus building and diplomacy, as keys to standards development. The speaker recognised the challenges faced by previous speakers – as women in standardisation – and thanked her supervisors and mentors for their support when onboarding.

53. The speaker underscored the male-dominated nature of standards development and welcomed language of DEI and gender which is increasingly entering standardization. She presented IEC work in the SDG-sphere, including the organization's mapping of standards (showcasing the link between IEC standards and the SDGs) and 1,180 publications related to SDG 5. The speaker noted that internal gender representation was improving (i.e., 50 per cent of departmental heads at IEC Secretariat are women) and the work of the Women at IEC initiative (launched Dec 2020), the Diversity Advisory Committee and joint IEC/ISO work, including activities on inclusive terminology. The speaker concluded that for product and technology standards, one size does not fit all.

54. The representative of Maynooth University commended panellists on their candour and posed a question to the representative of Keele University regarding what one thing could be instituted to change the gender representation in standards development.

55. The representative of Keele University and Women Leading in AI recognised the importance of professionalising the work; that would include funding and time given to participate in standards development. The speaker noted the importance of being actively invited to a technical committee, the need to raise awareness of how experts can get involved and the importance of a gender-first lens when addressing intersectionality.

56. The representative of the University of Stavanger discussed the informal work undertaken by women in the household. She highlighted whether there was a lack of support between women, from a recruitment perspective. She queried whether there was a limit of data-centric models and instruments.

57. The representative of Trade X and the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) presented her first-hand experience of being a professional in a male-dominated field. She discussed how we create biases – unintentionally and intentionally – and the immediate impact these have. With respect to technologies, the speaker noted their importance to educate men, women, girls and boys. Regarding the fears of AI, she projected that technology and business models will be heavily disrupted in the coming decade and underlined that governance and responsible AI are critical processes that require greater awareness and involvement to shape this process.

58. The representative of Keele University and Women Leading in AI explained that it is important to recognise that bias can get encoded throughout the life cycle of a product, including post-processing, and setting thresholds. Stakeholder engagement and diverse

inputs it should be throughout the entire lifecycle and be meaningful. Requiring participatory design should be part of the standards development process and part of the procurement guidelines.

59. The representative of the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) highlighted the importance of combating assumed professions based on gender. She called on all participants to ensure that no one is limited by their gender and underscored the need for more gender data.

60. The representative of the Lebanese Standards Institution (LIBNOR) questioned to what extent standards bodies, specifically ISO and IEC, can work towards introducing management systems for gender equality? Further, she asked whether this would encourage processes that were gender-inclusive.

61. The Coordinator of the GRSI thanked the representative of LIBNOR for the excellent question. From the perspective of the GRSI, the approach being advocated is for all standards to be gender-responsive – as they will be better for men and women. The speaker thanked panellists for their engaging presentations. She hoped the session gave further impetus to the discussion and notified participants that the next meeting of the Initiative will take place September 15th.

62. The Secretary of the Working Party explained that the meeting was part of the wider WP.6 Forum. He encouraged participants to consider attending the forthcoming sessions on risk management (Thursday 9th June) and market surveillance (Friday 10th June).