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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

#### **Cooperation with other organizations and Economic Commission for Europe bodies**

### **Report on cooperation with other organizations and Economic Commission for Europe bodies\***

**Submitted by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

This document provides an overview of cooperation under the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) subprogramme on Trade during the period July 2023–March 2024 for its workstreams in the areas that is mandated by intergovernmental bodies (trade capacities and standards, agricultural quality standards; regulatory cooperation and standardization policies; and trade facilitation policies and standards as well as on cross-cutting priorities of circular economy, digital and green transformations.

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\* This document has not been formally edited by ECE.



## **I. Introduction**

1. This document maps cooperation under the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) subprogramme on Trade during 2023–2024. It provides an overview of cooperation activities with international organizations and other ECE bodies to address cross-cutting priorities. Sections covering activities by the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) are for information only.

## **II. Agricultural Quality Standards**

2. Within the framework of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7), ECE cooperated with other relevant United Nations organizations on issues related to food systems and food loss and waste, particularly through the regional issue-based coalition on sustainable food systems (IBC-SFS) for Europe and Central Asia, which aims to advocate for and facilitate coordinated support for strengthening sustainable food systems. The IBC-SFS consists of includes the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), World Food Programme (WFP), World Health Organization (WHO), and World Metrological Organization (WMO).

3. Activities undertaken with IBC-SFS partners include preparation of the 2024 Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition in Europe and Central Asia (biennial publication of IBC-SFS), organization of a roundtable on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 as part of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (RFSD) (13–14 March 2024), a seminar on sustainable meat and livestock with FAO (29 August 2023), and a series of online Food Systems Talks hosted by FAO and ECE, in particular, the fourth Talk “Towards a circular economy of food: Views and perspectives for Europe and Central Asia” (11 July 2023). In connection with the RFSD in 2024, ECE also joined hands with the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub and the IBC-SFS in the organization of the regional meeting of Food Systems National Convenors in Europe and Central Asia (12 March 2024) and a side-event “Food Systems Transformation as an Accelerator for the SDGs Implementation and Climate Action” (13 March 2024).

4. ECE continues to work closely with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Fruit and Vegetables Scheme to facilitate the common interpretation of ECE standards and their application in international trade. It also continues to coordinate closely with the secretariat of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission when developing new commercial quality standards and maintaining existing ones. Finally, coordination with the European Commission is ongoing to ensure continued harmonization of EU marketing standards with ECE standards.

## **III. Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies**

### **A. Cooperation with international and regional organizations**

5. Through the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6), ECE is an observer at the World Trade Organization (WTO) Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). ECE participates in the official meetings of the TBT Committee. The work on market surveillance, conformity assessment, risk management, education on standardization, and regulating products using artificial intelligence (AI) or other embedded digital technologies are all key themes that are often on the table of WTO discussions. In the reporting period, the ECE secretariat provided input on these and the importance of gender-responsive standards, notably to the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (September 2023).

6. WP.6 has made a concerted effort to strengthen cooperation, including through joint activities, with other divisions within ECE. In the reporting period, WP.6 continued to advance a project on compliance with products used for the extraction and transport of hydrogen in cooperation with the Hydrogen Task Force of the Sustainable Energy Division. WP.6 consulted with the ECE World Forum for Harmonization of Vehicle Regulations (WP.29) of the Sustainable Transport Division on using artificial intelligence in autonomous vehicles and how this could inform the WP.6 project on product compliance of goods with embedded AI or other digital technologies. The WP.6 Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards consulted on how gender is considered in environmental outputs in cooperation with the Environment Division. WP.6 also partnered with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on their capacity-building activities, providing online trainings for the Gambia and Liberia (respectively May and June 2023).

7. WP.6 works with many regional organizations to promote its workstream on gender-responsive standards. Many of these regional organizations are signatories to the Gender-Responsive Standards Declaration, and they encourage their membership to adopt the principles of this Declaration and to become signatories themselves. In the reporting period, joint meetings were held with the African Standardization Organization (ARSO) on gender-responsive standards and gender action plans (July 2023) and with the Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT) (August 2023).

## **B. Cooperation with standard-setting and quality infrastructure organizations**

### **Standardization policies**

8. The standardization community continued to support the work of WP.6. The Declaration for Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development has been signed to date by 85 organizations, including 55 national standards bodies from all continents and all major international standards organizations (International Organization for Standardization (ISO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), voluntary sustainability standards (VSS) organizations and regional standards bodies).<sup>1</sup> In the reporting period, the Lesotho Standards Institution, the Salvadoran Organization for Standardization, the Kyrgyzstan Center for Standardization and Metrology, the UL Standards and Engagement (the United States of America), and the Kazakhstan Institute of Standardization and Metrology of (KazStandard) became signatories.

9. WP.6 continued to partner closely with IEC to support two sectoral initiatives, respectively, on equipment used in environments with an explosive atmosphere. The first of these benefits from the support of the IEC System for Certification to Standards Relating to Equipment for Use in Explosive Atmosphere (IECEx) and the other from the IEC Conformity Assessment Board (CAB).

10. During the reporting period, WP.6 participated in several key technical committees (TC) of ISO, notably ISO TC 262 on Risk Management. WP.6 also continued to benefit from in-depth cooperation with the ISO central secretariat, collaborating on key themes such as gender-responsive standards, education on standardization, and standards supporting the SDGs.

### **Metrology and other areas of the national and international system of quality infrastructure**

11. WP.6 works in partnership with national, regional, and international institutions that lay the foundations of quality infrastructure systems. In this area, the closest partner is the German Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), which has funded two extrabudgetary projects on SDGs and gender-responsive standards in recent years (2017–2019 and 2019–2022) and has agreed to fund a third project aiming to mainstream gender through the quality infrastructure chain.

<sup>1</sup> See complete list of signatories at: <https://unece.org/trade/wp6/Gender-Resp-Stds-declaration>.

12. Other close partners in this area are the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM), the International Accreditation Forum (IAF), IEC, the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), the International Organization of Legal Metrology (OIML), the International Committee for Legal Metrology (CIML), ISO, ITU and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). The cooperation has resulted in the update of Recommendation K on “Metrological Assurance of Conformity Assessment and Testing” (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2023/5).

13. Since 2010, the WP 6 has been a member of the “International Network on Quality Infrastructure” (previously Network on Metrology, Accreditation and Standardization for Developing Countries (DCMAS)), which includes BIPM, IAF, IEC, ILAC, ISO, ITU, OIML, and UNIDO, the World Bank and the WTO. In the reporting period, the cooperation included sharing expertise and mutual participation in meetings. Key partners were also solicited to author sections of the WP.6 publication *The Basics of Quality Infrastructure* (ECE/TRADE/478).

## **IV. Trade Facilitation Policies and Standards**

### **A. Cooperation with international and standard-setting organizations**

#### **Trade facilitation**

14. Trade facilitation and electronic business play a key role in the trade-related aspects of addressing value chain disruptions and ensuring sustainable and resilient recovery. UN/CEFACT, serviced by the ECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD), has been at the forefront of trade facilitation and digitalization for several decades, and it is well-placed to address global, regional and national challenges through developing and deploying global standards and digital solutions as well as enhancing traceability and transparency along value chains.

15. The five Regional Commissions (RCs) have taken a joint approach to trade facilitation. In 2015, they launched the first Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade, followed by the biennial editions in 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2023, the year UNCTAD joined as a partner. The five RCs and UNCTAD have jointly developed an online portal (unfsurvey.org) to help countries visualize and compare the implementation of measures across regions and economies. The most recent regional ECE report is to be published in May 2024.

16. Under a United Nations Development Account (UNDA) fourteenth tranche, the five RCs developed the “Blockchains for facilitating trade and enhancing competitiveness” project. This project, led by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), aims to strengthen national innovation and technological capacities for using blockchain technology in customs and trade operations in five selected developing countries. In the ECE region, the project focuses on Uzbekistan, for which ECE, in partnership with UNDP and relevant national stakeholders, including line Ministries, Customs and Business Associations, is performing a regulatory review, developing policy recommendations, and conducting training activities to be completed by the end of 2025.

#### **Digital trade facilitation**

17. The secretariat is one of four signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding on e-Business between the ISO, IEC, and ITU, signed in 2000. This group of experts ensures intersectoral coherence in the field of e-business, avoiding overlap and duplication among organizations and fostering digitalization. The 45th Meeting of the Electronic Business Memorandum of Understanding Management Group (eb-MoU) (December 2023) focused on e-business standards and coordinating work programs. At this meeting, the four signatories discussed the need to look into the future of the eb-MoU, particularly on modalities to use secretariat resources in support of relevant coordination activities efficiently. Furthermore, in the framework of the eb-MoU, the ECE secretariat is continuing to support official liaisons with ISO TCs, including ISO/TC 46 (information and documentation); ISO/TC 154 (processes, data elements and documents in commerce,

industry and administration); ISO/TC 315 (cold chain logistics); ISO 321 (e-commerce); ISO TC8 (ships and marine technology) and ISO/TC 323 (circular economy).

18. In 2022, the ECE secretariat joined the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Digital Standards Initiative (DSI) and is currently a member of the ICC DSI/Industry Advisory Board and Working Group on Key Trade Documents and Data Elements. The initiative aims to promote the harmonization of the digital representations of trade documents and the definitions of key data elements used in these documents. The Working Group has recently produced a report that provides an analysis of 36 key trade documents primarily based on UN/CEFACT instruments. The report is expected to be launched at the Commodity Trading Week Europe in April 2024.

19. Support was provided to the States participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)<sup>2</sup> to help their region become a connectivity hub with global outreach by using the UN/CEFACT standards. This resulted in the development, review and adoption by the Presidents of the SPECA participating States in April 2023 of the SPECA Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Corridor Using United Nations Legal Instruments and Standards.<sup>3</sup> A tangible outcome of this decision was the advancement of the acceptance of the UN/CEFACT standards as the primary reference for the digitalization of railway consignment notes. The pilot project was launched during an ECE seminar in May 2023 together with the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia (TRACECA), the International Committee on Railway Transport (CIT), the Organization on Railway Cooperation (OSJD) and the International Railway Union (IUC), and has since progressed through the development of a prototype of a CIM/SMGS consignment note following the UN/CEFACT naming rules, definitions, directories and schemas.<sup>4</sup>

20. For the implementation of the UNDA project on “COVID-19 Trade and Transport Connectivity” and the follow-up to the UNDA fourteenth tranche joint project “Sustainable mobility and smart connectivity(trade and transport nexus) in Central Asia, the Caucasus and Western Balkans”, ECE collaborated with the European Commission, DG MOVE and DG TAXUD, which use the ECE and UN/CEFACT package of standards in the implementation of the EU Regulations on Electronic Freight Transport (eFTI) and Customs Single Window. Other organizations with which ECE collaborates on the implementation of the package for multimodal data and document exchange include the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the OSJD, the CIT, TRACECA, the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and others.

### **Environmental, Social and Governance transparency and traceability**

21. Enhancing transparency and traceability of sustainable value chains in the garment and footwear sector project is implemented by ECE through its UN/CEFACT in close cooperation with the International Trade Center (ITC), OECD, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNCTAD, UNDP, GIZ, World Bank-International Finance Corporation (WB-IFC), Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), FAO, Global Fashion Alliance, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Global Compact, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), government institutions and private sector (business associations and private companies), academia, think tanks and non-governmental organizations. Progress was made on the ECE-UN/CEFACT

<sup>2</sup> The SPECA participating States are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, while Afghanistan does not participate in the SPECA activities. See [www.unece.org/speca](http://www.unece.org/speca).

<sup>3</sup> See [https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Roadmap%20for%20the%20Digitalization%20of%20the%20Trans-Caspian%20Corridor\\_final\\_v2\\_EN.pdf](https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Roadmap%20for%20the%20Digitalization%20of%20the%20Trans-Caspian%20Corridor_final_v2_EN.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> If the Trans-Caspian Corridor countries adopt the UN/CEFACT standards and supporting tools, then two regions will come closer together through interoperability based on the UN/CEFACT standards: the Trans-Caspian Corridor and the European Union.

product traceability approach and standards, which were adopted in 2021 and tested in blockchain pilot projects. Use cases were developed to trace products back to their origin, providing sustainability credentials that allow for substantiated claims regarding fibre content, chemical use, social and environmental performance, and animal welfare. ECE has finalized 19 use cases across 23 countries, including Türkiye and Uzbekistan, which are ECE programme countries.

22. Under the Sustainability Pledge, ECE collaborated with leading regional actors, including the Bocconi University School of Management, FAO, ITC, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC), UNIDO, WB-IFC, the German Organisation for International Cooperation (GIZ), and has involved government agencies from host countries and the sub-regions. There has been significant progress in disseminating the Sustainability Pledge Call to Action for ECE Recommendation 46, which received over 100 pledges from companies and stakeholders across 28 countries, involving a more extensive network of about 750 industry actors.

### **Information Exchange**

23. The FAO Global Record Working Group (GRWG) and the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) Technical Working Group on Information Exchange (TWG-IE) acknowledged the importance of ensuring that all designated ports under PSMA should be attributed to a United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE), and they expressed interest in closely cooperating with ECE on this area. A study paper was jointly drafted with FAO on using UN/LOCODE for the FAO Global Record to support combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. In addition, the secretariat will study the feasibility of identifying small fish ports with UN/LOCODE. As a result, the FAO GRWG will become the backbone of international fisheries management as it records vessels and their activities.

24. Jointly with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the secretariat closely cooperates with the CITES secretariat on the Task Force on Electronic CITES Permit Exchange (EPIX), aiming to support the stakeholders to initiate and carry out pilot-based and/or live electronic exchange of CITES permits to contribute to the prevention of fraudulent use of CITES permits and facilitate legal trade. The eCITES data model for the CITES Permits/Certificates is based on the UN/CEFACT Reference Data Model

## **V. Cross-cutting agendas on circular economy, digitalization and green transformations**

25. The ECE ECTD engaged a wide range of stakeholders in the series of official side events to the seventieth Commission Session (3–5 April 2023) on the circular economy transition, addressing agendas on overall policy frameworks, innovation, traceability of value chains and the role of platforms and alliances. The secretariat strengthened cooperation amongst its sections that service different intergovernmental bodies, especially in the context of cross-cutting agendas of the Trade and Economic Cooperation and Integration subprogrammes. For example, drafts of several policy papers on circular economy were discussed at the sessions of the ECE Team of Specialists on Innovation and Competitiveness Policies (November 2023) and the ECE Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships (December 2023) and circulated for peer review amongst experts of different bodies.<sup>5</sup>

26. As part of its work on fostering the circular economy transition, the ECE secretariat jointly organized a session on the important role the Harmonized System (HS) Codes can play in helping to address circular trade facilitation challenges at the World Trade Public Forum (15 September 2023) together with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Geneva office, the World Customs Organization (WCO) and Chatham House. A policy brief by FES and WCO titled *Going Circular: How the Harmonized System Codes Can/Not Support a Circular*

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<sup>5</sup> See also related policy briefs submitted to the Steering Committee (ECE/CTCS/2024/9 and ECE/CTCS/2024/10).

*Economy and What Else Could Be Done* was published in August 2023 with the support of the ECE Circular STEP – Stakeholder Engagement Platform to accelerate Circular Economy transition in the ECE region, which informed the discussion.

27. ECE has collaborated with several partners on issues related to food loss and waste and circularity, including with the World Resources Institute in organizing accelerator sessions on circularity in agri-food at the World Circular Economy Forum in Brussels, Belgium, on 18 April 2024.

28. On 12 October 2023, ECE ECTD secretariat attended the meeting of the Annual Academic Advisory Council of the United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS)<sup>6</sup> on “Building a Sustainable Future for Trade: A Multi-Dimensional Assessment of Voluntary Sustainability Standards in Global Sustainability Governance and Due Diligence for Developing Countries”. The UNFSS is a forum of six United Nations agencies (ITC, FAO, UNEP, UNIDO, UNCTAD and ECE), which aims to build transparency and knowledge on sustainability standards, their interactions with trade, and implications for developing countries. The meeting discussed various aspects of VSS in global sustainability governance. It raised numerous questions on the role of these instruments in advancing sustainable trade, including concerning the interplay of VSS and Due Diligence.

29. The UNFSS meeting was back-to-back with the World Trade Forum (WTF) on “Non-Economic Objectives and International Trade” at the European University Institute in Florence (12–13 October 2023), co-organized by the European University Institute, KU Leuven, German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). At the WTF, the ECE secretariat contributed to the plenary discussions on “Sustainability Standards, Supply Chain Due Diligence and Developing Countries”.

30. The ECE ECTD secretariat contributed to the Villars Framework Launch Event (17 September 2023), a joint event of the Villars Institute and the Remaking Trade for a Sustainable Future, aimed at shaping a people-centered and inclusive agenda to align the international trade system with sustainable development and climate change action. The discussion focused on the Villars Framework for a Sustainable Trading System, which represents the culmination of two years of intensive research, analysis, and discussion through ten thematic workshops exploring various aspects of the trade-sustainability interface, to which ECE has contributed through participating in thematic workshops and peer-reviewing related papers.

31. The ECE ECTD secretariat contributed to elaborating the Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) region, which is slated to be formally adopted before the end of 2024. ECE will support the implementation of this strategy through advisory services and capacity-building projects focused on, among other things, the implementation of UN/CEFACT digital standards and trade facilitation recommendations. Further, ECE stands ready to investigate strategies for enhancing sustainability and circularity within value chains in the region, notably in the garment and footwear sectors.

32. The ECE is exploring avenues for collaborating with the European Investment Bank (EIB) in strengthening the Central Trans-Caspian Network (CTCN). Potential areas for collaboration could include sustainable connections between Europe and Central Asia along with the TEN-T, drawing on UN/CEFACT work and the SPECA Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange along the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, using United Nations Legal Instruments and Standards. Other areas include sustainable value chain integration, drawing on the work of the ECE Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy, and value chain integration drawing on research work and capacity building activities under the Steering Committee.

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://unfss.org/>.