

UNECE

Gender Responsive Standards



UNITED NATIONS

UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

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UNITED NATIONS

New York and Geneva, 2019

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ECE/TRADE/445

UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION

<i>Sales No.:</i> E.19.II.E.22 ISBN: 978-92-1-117202-7 e-ISBN: 978-92-1-004103-4
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United Nations publication issued by the Economic Commission for Europe

ABSTRACT

This publication makes the case for mainstreaming gender in the development and implementation of standards. The first chapter places the discussion in the larger perspective of how standards contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals of Agenda 2030. It reviews the role of standards as a way of furthering equal participation by both genders in economic decision-making; as instruments for women's health, safety and well-being; and finally, as tools for sustainability reporting. The chapter also presents the UNECE "Gender Responsive Standards Initiative" as an important example of partnership among standards bodies, governments, the civil society, academia and other key stakeholders for gender equality.

The second chapter reviews a subset of standards, namely, voluntary sustainability Standards (VSS), as a common instrument used mostly by businesses to establish, incentivise and enforce commitments to sustainable development. The third chapter looks at how gender has been integrated into VSS, and the extent to which VSS have contributed to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The third chapter looks at another family of standards, namely, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, and discusses their impact on women. It then examines the extent to which gender issues play a role in the global governance of SPS measures and related capacity-building efforts. The chapter concludes by considering the policy implications for international trade institutions, donors and governments to ensure that SPS measures contribute to inclusive sustainable development.

The last chapter introduces recommendations for action directed to standards bodies, governments and donors and international organizations. It calls for all actors to thoroughly analyse the root causes of gender inequality and the impact it may have on standards development and implementation; to frame issues around global conventions and frameworks for women's rights; to act decisively by making a commitment to gender equality at the highest level of their organisation and integrate a gender perspective across all aspects of the standards system, in particular as concerns the needed support to producers and suppliers to apply standards in a gender sensitive way, and finally, to support the exchange of best practices at all levels and share emerging knowledge through a range of media and forums, so as to build momentum around gender-responsive standards.

FOREWORD

Multi-stakeholder dialogues and concerted actions on markets, in supply chains and within public institutions are of vital importance for the realization of the gender dimension of Agenda 2030 and the empowerment of women and girls. Voluntary standards provide an inclusive language that can be used by all actors and are a powerful tool that can sustain and further this broad cooperation effort.

A key forum for hosting this discussion is the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies which brings together policymakers and representatives of standards bodies and quality infrastructure institutions, alongside businesses, civil society and academia and other key stakeholders.

In 2016, the Working Party took on the new mandate of developing innovative approaches for mainstreaming gender in the development and implementation of standards. The work was entrusted to a dedicated group of experts: the “Gender Responsive Standards Initiative” which continues to meet bimonthly via electronic means to this date. The work of this group revealed that women’s representation in standards bodies was almost always below parity, and that there was no shared methodology to evaluate the gender implication of existing standards nor a methodology for developing new norms in a way that is fully gender-responsive.

This publication provides a large body of evidence to substantiate the work of this expert group. It reveals that if a focussed and concerted action is not started, standards will involuntarily replicate and amplify the bias against women that pervades the world of work. It also lists a series of recommendations for standards bodies, for policymakers and for businesses that seek to make the standards they develop and use responsive to the needs of all genders and to ensure that the standards development process they participate in is fully inclusive.

I recommend this publication to all stakeholders and invite interested parties to participate in the activities of the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative and of the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies, thus contributing to the global effort to make standards a vehicle for the realization of the aspirations and the fulfilment of the needs of women and girls worldwide.



Olga Algayerova

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was designed and edited by Ms. Lorenza Jachia, Economic Affairs Officer, UNECE and Secretary to the UNECE Working Party on “Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies”. Ms. Jachia also authored the introduction and the first chapter. The second and third chapters were authored, respectively, by Sally Smith, Researcher and Associate of WISE Development, a DAI Global company, and Prof. Spencer Henson, Full Professor at the University of Guelph, Canada. Comments received from Michelle Parkouda, Standards Council of Canada, Professor Patrice Braun, Federation University Australia, and Belinda Cleeland, ISO Secretariat are gratefully acknowledged, as are inputs from WISE Development associates Federica Busiello, Georgia Taylor and Elaine Jones.

The contributions of ASTM International, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and the Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB) in support of the UNECE project on “Standards for the SDGs” which provided funding for the research published in this volume are gratefully acknowledged.



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