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**Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade**

**WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS**

8 DECEMBER 2020

*Moderator's Report<sup>1</sup>*

The Moderator of the Workshop on the Role of Gender in the Development of Standards shall deliver this Report at the WTO TBT Committee's meeting of 24-26 February 2021.

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In the Eighth Triennial Review<sup>2</sup> Members agreed to hold a workshop on the role of gender in the development of standards. The programme for the workshop is contained in the Annex of this report. Please visit the dedicated [webpage](#) for the presentations and the recording of the event.

**1 WTO MEMBERS' PERSPECTIVE, EXPERIENCES AND BEST PRACTICES ON INCLUDING GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT, AND HOW IT RELATES TO TRADE**

1.1. **Ms Gabrielle White<sup>3</sup>** (Canada) mentioned that gender equality is important for the Canadian government, and that several initiatives have been undertaken to improve gender equality. At the Standards Council of Canada, an action plan has been developed and publicly released which takes into consideration the fact that standards are not neutral, they reflect the interests and values of the creators. Low participation of women, the speaker indicated, is problematic and there should be more awareness about this issue. She pointed to the example of PPE not being tailored to women while the large majority of workers in healthcare are women, linking the problem of underrepresentation of women in standardization to international trade.

1.2. **Ms Michelle Parkouda<sup>3</sup>** (Canada) continued, providing examples and referring to her recent research which indicates the underrepresentation of women in standardization and broader research and policy making has dire consequences. Examples in the area of medical research, voice recognition, PPE and car accidents were mentioned to illustrate this. Ms Parkouda also cited her research indicating that standards protect men better than women. She also provided numbers on the underrepresentation of women in standardization; while 48% of the workforce in Canada is female, the share of participation in standardizing organizations is a lot less. Including more women, Ms Parkouda pointed out, leads to better research and work performance, and that a minimum of 30% of women is needed to avoid marginalization and improve performance.

1.3. Ms White underscored that actions are underway, but a lot remains to be done. She referred to several possible actions included in the presentation slides. She concluded the presentation by highlighting that more inclusive standardization saves lives.

1.4. **Ms Jodi Scholtz<sup>4</sup>** (South Africa) presented the views of South Africa, referring to the national development plan and underscoring the importance of inclusiveness in relation to women, youth and persons with disabilities. The gender aspect of the national plan, advancing women's socio-economic

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<sup>1</sup> H.E. Mr. Stephen de Boer, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Canada to the WTO. This report is provided under his own responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> [G/TBT/41](#), para. 5.8.b.

<sup>3</sup> Standards Council of Canada (SCC)

<sup>4</sup> South African Bureau of Standards (SABS)

empowerment and promoting gender equality happens through (1) strategic leadership, (2) gender mainstreaming, (3) generating gender knowledge and analysis of policies and policy implementation, (4) monitoring and evaluation systems and (5) public participation through outreach and advocacy.

1.5. In the presentation, Ms Scholtz focused more closely on the work of SABS in the area of gender equality. The SABS work, she stated, encompasses three main areas: developing, promoting and maintaining South African National Standards, promoting quality with respect to commodities, products and services and providing CAPs. To do so, the SABS works together with other partner organizations in the government. The SABS action plan on gender equality builds on the UNECE declaration on Gender Responsive Standards which the SABS signed in September 2019. It provides a practical framework for standards bodies, according to the presenter. Referring to the SGDs, Ms Scholtz listed three key areas of work included in the SABS action plan: Gender representation, gender responsiveness and outreach and advocacy. Ms Scholtz continued the presentation by giving examples of standards taking into account the gender perspective, such as the SANS 511 on women's workwear referring to dimensions specific to women. The benefits of a gender inclusive approach in standardization were discussed, such as the effects on levelling the economic playing field, the competitiveness of companies and fit for purpose goods. In conclusion, Ms Scholtz pointed out that standardizing bodies should embrace diversity and inclusion in the development of standards.

1.6. **Mrs. Silvia Vaccaro**<sup>5</sup> (European Union) explained that while the European Commission does not develop standards the Commission does have a strong commitment towards gender equality. On 5 March 2020, the European Commission adopted a communication repeating that Gender equality is a core value, a fundamental right and a key principle of the European pillar of social rights. Mrs. Vaccaro underlined that to reach its full potential, the EU must use all its talent and diversity in politics and society. Gender equality will also lead to more jobs and productivity. While the EU is a leader in this regard, she stated, no full equality has been reached and progress is slow. The presenter repeated that the European Commission does not make standards but follows the activities of the UNECE WP6 Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative and indicated that the CEN CENELEC and many EU national standardisation bodies have signed the UNECE declaration on Gender responsive standards.

1.7. **Ms Deborah Wautier**<sup>6</sup> (European Union) provided an overview of gender-related actions and discussion CEN-CENELEC are carrying out. CEN-CENELEC is, the presenter stated, an open and transparent network that supports development of high-quality standards. The network consists of 43 members which are national standardization bodies. Inclusiveness is a key value for the organization as standards need to deliver to diverse needs, and therefore all stakeholders should be included in the development process. Gender equality is one aspect, but inclusiveness is a broader concept, the speaker explained, referring to other stakeholders as well.

1.8. CEN-CENELEC had signed the UNECE declaration for Gender Responsive Standards in May 2019, together with more than 20 members. Applying a bottom-up approach to implement the declaration, a survey was conducted among its members, of which the results served as a basis for an action plan. Ms Wautier referred to the slides where key results of the survey in terms of good practices and challenges were listed. The action plan, she explained, consisted of targeted actions, spread over a 3-year agile plan with a focus on sharing information and collaboration, enabling global cooperation. The action plan was approved in November 2019. One of the first-year outcomes was the setting up of an informal Gender Coordination Group, open to all CEN-CENELEC members and serves to set up activities to raise awareness. Currently, 12 members have joined. In addition, the presenter mentioned several other activities that are being carried out in parallel with the action plan, such as Women4Cyber and the WeClub. In conclusion, the presenter indicated steps in the right direction are being taken by the whole standardization community.

## 2 WORK AND ACTIVITIES OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE SUBJECT

2.1. **Ms Judith Fessehaie**<sup>7</sup> (ITC) presented insights on standards and gender drawn from ITC's SheTrades Initiative. She began by providing an overview of the [SheTrades Initiative](#), which aims to connect 3 million women entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses to international markets by

<sup>5</sup> Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission

<sup>6</sup> CEN-CENELEC

<sup>7</sup> Policy and Data Lead, ITC.

2021. The Initiative, which was launched in 2015, works with governments, corporations and business support organizations to undertake research, shape enabling trade policies and regulations, facilitate financing and expand access to public tenders and corporate supply chains. She then highlighted three main areas of work in the initiative in relation to standards and gender: supporting women-owned businesses' compliance to standards, supporting women's participation in trade policy design and implementation and developing an ISO international workshop agreement for women in trade.

2.2. With regards to compliance with standards, the presentation provided findings on the challenges faced by women in complying with standards, which include limited awareness of knowledge in selecting the right standards, lack of finance, technical capacity, language and human resources, among others. Based on an example from the African Continental Free Trade Area, she also highlighted the key opportunities and recommendations on standards which would increase women-owned businesses' compliance with standards as well as their participation in trade policy design and implementation. Finally, she elaborated on a key issue presented by the lack of a universally agreed upon definition(s) of women-owned/-led businesses as well as the progress that the ISO International Workshop Agreement 34 on definition(s) of women's entrepreneurship jointly developed with the Swedish Institute of Standards is making on that front.

2.3. **Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen**<sup>8</sup> (UNECE) provided an overview of UNECE's work on gender responsiveness in standards and standardization. To this end, he provided a background on the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative (GRSI), launched by UNECE, which aims to strengthen the use of standards and technical regulations as powerful tools to attain SDG 5<sup>9</sup>, integrate a gender lens in the development of both standards and technical regulations, and elaborate gender indicators and criteria that could be used in standards development. To do so, the initiative developed the Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards whereby signatories (which consist mainly of standards bodies) pledge to create and implement gender action plans in order to support more gender-balanced and inclusive standards development processes, and to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of standards themselves.

2.4. The Initiative also provides awareness-raising resources and sessions, including, for example, the various GRSI expert working groups, an open platform repository on gender responsive standards, and the UNECE portal on standards for SDGs. In the future, the Initiative has a few projects in the pipeline including launching an e-learning training platform, mapping standards to SDG 5, establishing standards body gender focal points, and providing gender-responsivity trainings.

### 3 REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF HOW GENDER CONSIDERATIONS HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

3.1. **Prof. Astrid Linder**<sup>10</sup> (Sweden) discussed the importance of gender considerations in the development of standards in relation to car safety. At the outset, she highlighted her vision that by 2030, injury protection performances of new cars would be assessed both for women and men. She explained that a glimpse at the current research would show that the data for this initiative to happen is readily available, and that it is a matter of deciding to use this data. The presentation provided several statistics and figures with regards to traffic safety, noting that 1.35 million deaths occur annually due to traffic accidents, and that women are more at risk compared to men of serious injuries and fatalities given same crash severities. She then described the various protection performances conducted for vehicles, noting that standards of such performances are not targeted towards females inasmuch as they are for males.

3.2. In addition, the presentation outlined the models of the occupant in legislative vehicle safety tests to demonstrate that in the various tests, the main passenger model is an average male, and that under no considerations are females included as part of the testing population. She also highlighted certain provisions of The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which state that all activities should aim to eliminate inequalities between men and women and that gender equality perspectives should be applied to any planned policy actions, including legislation. Furthermore, the lack of the female part of the population (the average female) represented in crash tests dummies was displayed. She showed, from recent research, that the data to make models of

<sup>8</sup> Chief, Market Access Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division, UNECE.

<sup>9</sup> SDG 5: "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls".

<sup>10</sup> Research Director, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute.

the average female is available. To this end, she noted a gap between the law and the regulatory tests conducted in practice in Europe.

#### **4 COMMENTS BY THE MODERATOR**

4.1. In his capacity as Moderator, **Ambassador de Boer** (Canada) noted the current momentum to further the work on gender-responsive standards. What was an emerging issue in 2017-2018 has now become an issue of interest to many WTO Members, international organizations, and private sector stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic further shed a light on the importance of gender in the development of standards. For example, women represent 70% of healthcare workers, and everyday their safety rests on their personal protective equipment (gloves, masks, protective glasses...). This equipment is produced in compliance with standards that currently fail to consider biological differences, leaving women at greater risk of exposure. Ambassador de Boer further stressed that although the workshop allowed for substantive and constructive contributions to this important topic, additional work still needs to be carried out in the context of the TBT Committee and the new WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender

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## **ANNEX**

### **WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS**

8 DECEMBER 2020, STARTING AT 4.00 PM

#### *Programme*

In the Eighth Triennial Review Members agreed to hold a workshop on the role of gender in the development of standards. This workshop will take place virtually on Zoom. Interpretation will be provided in English, French and Spanish. Please register to participate in the event.

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The workshop will be moderated by: **H.E. Mr. Stephen de Boer, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Canada to the WTO**

#### **Panel 1: WTO Members' perspective, experiences and best practices on including gender considerations in standards development, and how it relates to trade**

- Ms Gabrielle White and Ms Michelle Parkouda, Standards Council of Canada (SCC)
- Ms Jodi Scholtz, Towards gender equality: a developing country perspective, South African Bureau of Standards (SABS)
- *Gender consideration in the EU*, Ms Silvia Vaccaro, Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission
- *Gender and standards initiative in European standardisation*, Ms Deborah Wautier, CEN-CENELEC

#### **Panel 2: Work and activities of international organizations on the subject**

- *The Women and Trade Programme*, Ms Judith Fessehaie, Trade and Development Manager, ITC
- *The Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative*, Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, Chief of Market access section, UNECE

#### **Panel 3: Real-world examples of how gender considerations have been taken into account in standards development**

- *Gender Responsive Standards and Car Safety*, Ms Astrid Linder, Research Director, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute
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