



**UNECE**



**Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)**

## **BUILDING BACK BETTER**

**Shared solutions as a critical tool for  
Sustainable Development in the era of COVID-19**

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE | 2 NOVEMBER 2020 | 15:30-17:30 | GENEVA



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### The Context

The UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) is one of the oldest inter-governmental bodies in the United Nations. This inter-governmental body is celebrating its 50 years of existence in 2020. The thematic priorities of the Working Party, which include standardization, risk management, market surveillance and gender-responsive standards, are highly pertinent in the context of sustainable economic recovery from the pandemic. At a time when global trade is marred by the COVID-19 pandemic and its widespread impact, WP.6 is commemorating its anniversary with a Jubilee Conference to draw wider attention to solutions from international regulatory cooperation.

**The importance of cooperation and dialogue** between countries and their institutions are far greater in a crisis period. What was a threat of spreading coronavirus or COVID-19 in December 2019, became a full-fledged global economic crisis in a matter of months. International supply chains have been disrupted. In addition, there has been a spike in demand for essential products like masks, ventilators, medicines and food items. Countries, developing and developed alike, are fighting the health and economic crisis simultaneously as the economic impact is likely to continue for several years. In all of the above cases, the need for greater cooperation among the regulatory agencies is crucial. In the Global Wake Up call, the United Nations Secretary General Mr. António Guterres highlighted the importance of 'reimagining the way nations cooperate'. Taking impetus from the Secretary General's call, this conference will facilitate the dialogue among the member States and international organizations for a shared solution.

One of the top priorities for countries, during the pandemic or in a post-pandemic scenario, is **to protect its people from pandemics** like this, safeguard their natural, financial and human resources, and thus ensure a sustainable recovery. The WTO reported that at least two-thirds of the notifications related to COVID-19 have been about standards and regulations (2020). Effective risk management allows countries to develop and implement standards and regulations that protect their citizens, without creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade and unwanted impact on industry's competitiveness. Taking risk-informed decisions is the way to go. However, achieving effective risk management requires harmonization of regulatory frameworks and standards with other countries. This conference honours 50 years of work in identifying good practices for harmonization of standards and cooperation among regulatory bodies for a shared solution to sustainable recovery. The conference will focus on the prioritised thematic areas of quality infrastructure, gender-responsive standards and recovery.

**Quality infrastructure** helps to mitigate the negative effects of contagion and underpins efforts to deliver continuity in trade. Conformity assessment, metrology, proliferation of standards and accreditation are all essential elements of quality infrastructure. The conference will consider how quality infrastructure helps to meet the manifold challenges of the pandemic and support member States to meet societal needs; by alleviating trade disruptions.



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The **Gender-Responsive Standards Initiative** strives to make standards and standards development processes more aligned with the needs of women. Under the umbrella of the UNECE Gender-Responsive Standards Declaration, regional and national standards bodies work together to ensure standards – like those on filtering masks, medical gloves and protective clothing – are gender-responsive. The global health crisis has brought to light the extent of gender bias in testing and the subsequent impact on the healthcare workforce, more than 70 percent of whom are women according to the World Health Organization (2019). In Spain and Italy, infection rates among health personnel appear significantly higher among women than among men<sup>1</sup>.

The **recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic should be sustainable** i.e. environmentally sound, socially acceptable and economically viable. Without a sustainable recovery, the urge for return to 'business as usual' may yield economic returns but may be damaging for the environment and social cohesion. This calls for a 'new normal' and invites the opportunity to embrace the concept of 'circularity'. The working party is well placed to promote best practice and innovations for a shared solution for the member States. The conference will address the ways in which the working party contributes to strengthening resilience of member States to future crisis events.

### Objective

The objective of this conference is to discuss how internationally agreed standards can build bridges for a shared solution for regulatory cooperation and standardization in support of member States' efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussants will consider how the activities of WP.6 and its partners can help to meet the myriad challenges of the pandemic and support member States to Build Back Better by alleviating trade disruptions, incorporating circularity into economic policies and adopting internationally harmonized policies and regulations.

### Participants

Representatives of UNECE member States from the Permanent Missions in Geneva or the capitals, other UN member States, international organizations, national, regional and international standardization bodies, civil society bodies, academia, private sectors and individual experts.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/op-ed-eca-alia-el-yassir-ppe-standards-must-respond-to-womens-needs>



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### Agenda

15.30 – 15:45	Opening Remarks
	Representative of Canada (Chair) Executive Secretary & Under-Secretary-General, UNECE
15.45 – 16:05	Invited Comment
	Representative, IEC <i>How standards helped in the prevention and mitigation of COVID-19</i>
	Representative, ISO <i>How standards can be leveraged for a sustainable, resilient recovery</i>
16:05 – 17:30	Panel Discussion <i>Chair Introduces Panel &amp; Outlines structure</i>
	Representative, OECD <i>Regulatory Quality and the Global Health Crisis: Managing the Risks for a Sustainable Recovery</i>
	Representative, UN WOMEN <i>Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19: Building an Inclusive Recovery Model</i>
	Representative, DIN <i>Innovation in Standards: How National Standards Bodies adapted to the Global Health Crisis</i>
16:35 – 16:45	Questions from participants
	Representative, UNIDO <i>Responding to the Crisis: Why Quality Infrastructure Remains Critical in the Fight Against COVID-19?</i>
	Representative, Government of Georgia <i>Managing the Pandemic: Lessons to be Taken from Georgia's Experience with COVID-19</i>
	Representative, WTO <i>The Role of Standards and Regulation in Mitigating Gender-Specific Impacts of COVID-19</i>
17:15 – 17:30	Chair poses questions to Panel Speakers ( <i>3 agreed questions</i> ) Closes session