COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Twenty-second session
Geneva, 13 to 17 May 2019

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system and elsewhere on their efforts in 2018 to implement the outcome of the WSIS

Submission by

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 22nd session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

Progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of the
World Summit on the Information Society
at the regional and international levels

I.   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.   The implementation of the outcomes of WSIS by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) has focussed on areas related to economic development and sustainability. The work of the UNECE to support the WSIS objectives is carried out at the subprogramme level and the variety of activities reflects the multi-sectoral character of the organization.

2.   Trade facilitation, including through the use of electronic tools, is an important area of work for the UNECE. In 2018, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), developed and revised recommendations in 2018 regarding business-to-business transactions and the principles of Single Window. The Trade Faciliation Implementation Guide is being updated to better support the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. UNECE has carried out training and capacity-building activities in our region and beyond on single window implementation, e-commerce initiatives, simplification of documentary procedures through ICT and other related topics.

3.   UN/CEFACT completed a White Paper on the use of Distributed Ledger Technologies (including Blockchain) to support electronic business and trade facilitation measures. Furhther work is planned to explore how this technology could be used to facilitate exchanges in a secure way. Work continued on the development of E-business standards to help businesses and government exchange information in many areas, including transport, supply chain, customs, agriculture, procurement, insurance and finance. In 2018, the electronic invoice standard of UN/CEFACT, the Cross-Industry Invoice, entered into force as an obligatory standard for all public procurement within the European Union.

4.   UN/CEFACT has simplified the use of its semantic library of business terms for electronic messages, the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library with the use of Reference Data Models (RDM). The Multi-Modal Transport RDM was completed and published in 2018 and joins the already available RDM for Supply Chain.

5.   Access to information and knowledge on environmental matters through the use of electronic tools remains an important area of activity for UNECE, in particular in connection with the Aarhus Convention and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). The Task Force on Access to Information has been promoting active dissemination of environmental information through the use of modern digital technologies. Case studies have been compiled on the effective use of electronic information tools and related issues to support capacity-building initiatives. In 2018, work was conducted to promote the PRTR as a tool for informed decisions in different areas such as urban planning, health policies and energy consumption.

II. OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

The following sections describe the work done by the various UNECE subprogrammes to support individual WSIS Action Lines.

A. ACTION LINE C1: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC GOVERNANCE AUTHORITIES AND ALL STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PROMOTION OF ICTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Trade

6. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) develops and maintains recommendations and standards through a collaboration of the public and private sectors to facilitate national and international trade and business transactions. The base guidance on Single Window has been further developed with the finalization of the Single Submission Portal Recommendation aiming to stimulate platforms for business-to-business transactions as well as the launch of the revision of Recommendation 33 providing the base principles of Single Window.

B. ACTION LINE C3: ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE

Environment

7. In 2018, UNECE continued to support the development of a Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) across the pan-European region and assessed the progress made so far. The aim is to ensure that timely, reliable and high-quality environmental information, which is essential for evidence-based policies and informing the public, is easily accessible. Under the UNECE Environmental Performance Review Programme, country reviews were published of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mongolia, each of which includes a chapter addressing environmental education and access to environmental information. Reviews were initiated of Kazakhstan and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

8. Activities under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) aim to promote effective public access to environmental information. The Budva Declaration and Decision IV/1 of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention (Budva, Montenegro, 11-14 September 2017) and outcomes of the thematic session of the Working Group of the Parties to the Convention (Geneva, 19-21 June 2018) outlined further actions to strengthen the implementation of the information pillar of the Convention. The Parties welcomed past initiatives to widen and improve public accessibility of environmental information, including through electronic information tools, e-government, Open Government Data and the Shared Environmental Information System in the pan-European region initiatives, establishment of single web access points and other similar actions.

9. The Task Force on Access to Information has been promoting active dissemination of environmental information through the use of modern digital technologies. The Task Force was further mandated to prepare by the 2021 session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention an update of the recommendations, taking into account the developments in the Shared Environmental Information System, geospatial information management, Earth observation data, e-Government, open government data, reuse of public sector information and other relevant initiatives and technical developments. The work in this area also included a collection of case studies related to the effective use of electronic information tools, further development of the Aarhus Clearinghouse for environmental democracy and

national nodes, and support to capacity-building initiatives.[1]

10.   The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Aarhus Convention is the only global legally binding instrument to ensure public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide PRTRs. It provides minimum standards for equal rights and transparency in the use of environmental data and offers a legal framework for enhancing public access to information. Free web-based access to geo-referenced environmental data empowers the public, decision makers in government and industry, scientists and journalists to make informed choices. In 2018, in addition to improving knowledge-sharing and access to data contained in PRTRs, the work focused on promoting PRTRs as a tool for informed decisions in different areas such as urban planning, health policies and energy consumption. To share the related innovative experiences and major challenges and discuss the role of PRTRs for achieving SDGs, a Global Round Table was organised under the auspices of UNECE and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, in cooperation with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the United Nations Environment Programme.

Trade

11.   The Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG) brings together the standards and tools of the UNECE and other organizations in a free, web-based, interactive knowledge management tool. It provides a single source where policymakers and implementers can find essential trade facilitation information. The TFIG is available in English, French, Russian, Spanish and Arabic and is currently being updated in order to further support the implementation of the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA).

C.   ACTION LINE C4: CAPACITY-BUILDING

Environment

12.   The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and of the Prototocol on PRTRs in cooperation with partner organizations continued its efforts to strengthen countries' capacities to disseminate and reuse environmental information; establish and improve PRTRs and effectively use electronic information tools for implemenation of the Aarhus Convention[2] and its Protocol. Synergies with initiatives that could make environmental information or data produced or commissioned by governments publicly available to access, reuse and redistribute are being explored further, including Open Government, Open Data, e-Government, SEIS, geospatial information management, Earth observation data and the use of PRTRs for reporting under other multilateral environmental agreements.

13.   The capacities of national experts in producing, managing and using environmental information – including with respect to monitoring and reporting on the implementation of environment-related Sustainable Development Goals – are developed through meetings of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment and the Joint Task Force on Environmental Statsitics and Indicators. In addition, capacity-building activities are carried out, for example, as envisaged in the United Nations Development Account project (2018–2021) on improved environmental monitoring and assessment in support of the 2030 Agenda in selected countries.

---

[1]   More information is accessible http://www.unece.org/env/pp/aarhus/tfai/case_studies.html
[2]   For the information on ongoing capacity-building cooperation, see http://www.unece.org/env/pp/oa.html

Trade

14.   UNECE supports countries in the implementation of measures foreseen in the WTO TFA and other trade facilitation initiatives through training and capacity building conferences throughout the ECE region as well as, in cooperation with other organizations, in Western Asia and Africa. These initiatives include events targeting the implementation of single window, national trade facilitation bodies, e-commerce initiatives, streamlining documentary procedures through ICT and digitalized transport documentation.

D.   ACTION LINE C5: BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND SECURITY IN THE USE OF ICTS

Trade

15.   UN/CEFACT has completed a White Paper on the use of Distributed Ledger Technologies (including Blockchain) to support electronic business and trade facilitation measures. This technology has the potential of improving the trustworthiness of transactions and allow greater collaboration in a secure environment. This will be accompanied in the coming months with specific cases on how this technology can be used to enhance trade facilitation in secure electronic exchanges. Further work will be carried out in 2019 on the interoperability between ledgers in order to ensure a transference of reliability.

E.   ACTION LINE C7: ICT APPLICATIONS

1.   **C7.B e-Business**

Trade

16.   UN/CEFACT has delivered e-Business standards and semantics in order to help businesses and governments to exchange information in many areas, including transport, supply chain, customs, agriculture, procurement, insurance abd finance. These include business process models, electronic message schemas, international code lists, guidance material and recommendations. In 2018, the electronic invoice standard of UN/CEFACT, the Cross-Industry Invoice, entered into force as an obligatory standard for all public procurement within the European Union. Another obligatory EU standard for sustainable fisheries which was developed and is maintained by UN/CEFACT, "FLUX" has been expanded to other markets. An electronic road consignment note (e-CMR) has been finalized and published, in support of the UNECE Convention On The Contract For The International Carriage Of Goods By Road.

17.   UN/CEFACT has sought to simplify the use of its semantic library of business terms for electronic messages, the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library. This is done through Reference Data Models (RDM) which create a logical subset of all semantic data and codes required in a specific area of activity. The Multi-Modal Transport RDM was completed and published in 2018 and joins the already available RDM for Supply Chain. Other RDMs will be proposed in the future to facilitate eBusiness transactions for accounting/audit, agriculture, travel/tourism and other areas. All existing e-Business messages are being updated to support and reflect these RDMs.

2. *C7.F e-Environment*

Environment

18.   In 2018, the Aarhus secretariat, in collaboration with UNITAR, OECD, EEA, UNEP, OSCE and REC CEE, continued to provide up-to-date information on available electronic tools for access to environmental information and Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). The related good practices and case studies can be accessed at the PRTR.net global portal[3], PRTR Learn[4], the UNECE Public Participation website[5], and the Aarhus Clearinghouse for environmental democracy[6].

---

[3]   https://www.prtr.net
[4]   https://prtr.unitar.org
[5]   https://www.unece.org/env/pp/welcome.html
[6]   https://aarhusclearinghouse.unece.org/