COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Twenty-seventh session
Geneva, 15-19 April 2024

Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2023 to implement the outcomes 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 27th 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) remains focussed on areas related to economic development and sustainability, with a particular emphasis on access to information regarding environment, forest and energy, and business applications on trade.

2.   Access to information is a basic requirement for evidence-based decisions, leading to effective government policies and informed choices by consumers. In the area of environment, UNECE services and promotes the implementation of multilateral agreements and instruments that set legal standards on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention), or criteria for searchability and structure of data dissemination tools for releases of pollution and movement of waste (Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers).

3.   In 2023, UNECE activities continued to advance effective public access to environmental information through the use of modern digital technologies. They supported the implementation of the principles and pillars of Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) and the efforts of member States in advancing their digitalization relying on open data, big data and state-of-the-art digital technologies while improving data availability, transparency and public participation in decision-making.

4.   UNECE, together with partners, collects and presents online data on forests and sustainable forest management, with a revamped interface that will enable a new data collection, verification and presentation cycle. In the area of energy, UNECE has used digital tools to create collaborative spaces for policy discussions on energy efficiency in buildings and develop a repository of good practices and experiences.

5.   UNECE maintains hundreds of freely available internationally recognized digital standards and trade facilitation recommendations. In 2023, it published a White Paper on Single Window Assessment Methodology. It has continued to increase its activities on traceability using blockchain technology. Initially focused on garment and footwear, work has expanded to other sectors, such as agri-food and extractives, including critical raw materials.

6.   As part of its activities to support regional cooperation, UNECE is engaged in the development of a roadmap for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the trans-Caspian transport corridor using relevant UN standards and conventions, including through a regional pilot project for countries in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA).

## II.	OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMME-SPECIFIC ACTIONS

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

**B.	ACTION LINE C3: ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE**

Environment

8.	In 2023 UNECE continued to support the implementation of the principles and pillars of the Shared Environmental Information System (SEIS) and open data across the pan-European region to enhance data availability, including on the UNECE Environmental Indicators, and further promoted the use of new technologies. At the Ninth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference (5-7 October 2022, Nicosia) countries were encouraged, when developing digitalization of environmental information systems relying on open data, big data and state-of-the-art digital technologies, to improve data availability, transparency and public participation in decision-making.

9.	 Activities under the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) aimed to further advance effective public access to environmental information. In 2023, these activities continued to focus on active dissemination of environmental information, as open digital data records, and the use of modern digital technologies by both public authorities and the public. A particular attention is given to promoting public access to environment-related information on products and the use of digital product passports and other new digital technologies in this area.

10.	The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Aarhus Convention 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. Ongoing work covers issues such as comprehensive data gathering and links with other electronic databases; modern means to provide easy to access information; and promotion of knowledge about use of pollutant releases and transfers data for fact-based decision-making, including on spatial planning, human health and the shift to a sustainable and circular economy.

Energy

11.	In 2023, UNECE continued strengthening the virtual Collaborative Environment for Experts on Energy Efficiency in Buildings in the UNECE region, a network of experts from public and private sectors on energy efficiency in buildings that aims at enhancing their capacities by sharing knowledge and expertise. It has two components: (i) online database of experts, and (ii) online collaborative tool. The collaborative tool collates energy efficiency projects, best practices, case studies, and relevant events.

Forest

12.	UNECE collects, together with FAO and Forest Europe, pan-European data on forests and sustainable forest management. This data is one of the main international sources of information on forests in the region. A new data collection, verification and presentation cycle will be supported by a revamped digital online interface. Complemented by a technical guide and workshops for future users, this online platform is a technological breakthrough in Pan-European data collection.

This online platform will reduce the national reporting burden and optimize resource use, while enhancing data credibility and completeness. This makes it easier to access state-of-the art information on forest ecosystems and strengthens capacities for evidence-based decision-making. UNECE intends to expand automation and the use of ICTs to improve international knowledge platforms on forest resources.

C. ACTION LINE C4: CAPACITY-BUILDING

Environment

13. The secretariat of the Aarhus Convention and of the Protocol on PRTRs in cooperation with partner organizations, continued its efforts to strengthen countries' capacities to disseminate and reuse environmental information and promote modernization of nationwide digital environmental information systems using best available state-of-the-art digital technologies, including establishing and improving PRTRs. Knowledge management tools, such as the Aarhus Clearinghouse and its online databases, support these efforts. Under the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Programme, the use of new technologies was promoted and capacity development activities were conducted to support data availability and timely flow of reliable information and data at national level.

14. In 2023 within the framework of the Working Group on Environmental Monitoring and Assessment, UNECE continued to promote SEIS, open data principles and the use of new technologies. Together with UNEP, UNECE conducted capacity development activities related to environmental monitoring, statistics and reporting. Support is being provided to Uzbekistan to develop a national state of the environment report. Once finalised, an interactive online version of the report will be created.

E. ACTION LINE C7: ICT APPLICATIONS: BENEFITS IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE

1. **C7. E-Business**

Trade facilitation

15. UNECE maintains hundreds of freely available internationally recognized digital standards and trade facilitation recommendations, developed by its subsidiary body the UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). These standards and recommendations enable countries to establish paperless trading systems as well as risk-based customs clearance systems in a manner that is consistent with the requirements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA). Most recently, UNECE developed a new package of standards for the digitalization of information flows along multi-modal supply chains, including the support of inter-operability between all transport modes.

16. UNECE published a W*hite Paper on Single Window Assessment Methodology* in 2023. This Paper provides a valuable guidance tool for evaluating the implementation of Single Window facilities,

which streamline trade and transport operations by enabling stakeholders to submit standardized information and documents through a singular portal to meet all import, export, and transit-related regulatory obligations. It draws upon UNECE Recommendations on Single Window (33), on Single Window Interoperability (36), and on Trade Information Portals (38). In September 2023, UN/CEFACT initiated a new project aimed at outlining guidelines for establishing Regional Single Windows.

Sustainable trade

17. Through its "Traceability for Sustainable Garment and Footwear" initiative, UNECE is helping enterprises to engage in sustainable trade with the support of blockchain technology. The initiative, which is spearheaded by the *UNECE Team of Specialists on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in the Circular Economy*, features a toolkit, comprising guidelines, case studies and standards, for enhancing traceability throughout the garment and footwear industries' value chains, which have been developed drawing on UN/CEFACT e-business standards. In addition, the *Sustainability Pledge* is encouraging governments and producers develop concrete actions using the toolkit. As of September 2023, 80 pledges have been submitted to UNECE, involving 100 actors, including 41 micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and 287 partners. Following achievements in the garment and leather sector, the mandate of the Team of Specialists was expanded to other sectors, such as agri-food and extractives, including critical raw materials.

2. **C7. e-Environment**

Environment

18. In 2023, the Aarhus secretariat, in collaboration with many other partners, 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, PRTR Learn, the UNECE Public Participation website, the Aarhus Clearinghouse for environmental democracy, and the online Aarhus Convention and Protocol on PRTRs national implementation reporting tools.

D. C11: INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

C11: Regional action plan

19. UNECE, together with ESCAP, is supporting the countries participating in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) in their efforts to gear trade and innovation towards the achievement of the SDGs.

20. In April 2023, SPECA governments, which gathered in Geneva on the margins of the UNECE 70th Commission session, adopted a joint statement emphasizing the unique role that SPECA Programme can play in harnessing trade, innovation, circular economy and PPP for sustainable and resilient development in Central Asia. They also requested UNECE to develop a roadmap for the digitalization of multimodal data and document exchange along the trans-Caspian transport corridor using relevant UN standards and conventions, including through a regional pilot project for SPECA participating States.