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Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

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Recommendations and standards:
Implementation support material

Call to Action for Improved Digitalization Through the Use of United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business Standards

Submitted by the Bureau for endorsement

Summary

Digitalization has the potential to improve processes, reduce the need for rekeying of data, save time and reduce human contact. Digitalization can be optimized through the use of internationally recognized standards; if electronic messages are harmonized to international best practices, they are easier to exchange with other partners using the same or similar standards. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) is uniquely positioned to develop and maintain such internationally recognized standards as participation in UN/CEFACT is open and free of charge to both the public and private sectors. The member States of the United Nations have the final word on the deliverables, and the deliverables are available for use on the UN/CEFACT website and can be used free of charge.

This Call to Action is the culmination of over fifty years of development work, both within UN/CEFACT and by its predecessors, and concerns all UN/CEFACT deliverables. This includes standardized business processes; standardized semantics through the Core Component Library (UN/CCL) and Reference Data Models; standardized syntax through the eXtensible Markup Language (XML) schema and the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT); standardized code lists; and standardized guidance in its recommendations and White Papers.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/13 is submitted by the Bureau to the twenty-seventh session of the Plenary for endorsement.

I. Introduction

1.   While many may be familiar with the concept of paperless trading, the mechanics of how exactly paperless trading works is one that most individuals involved with trade, whether from business or government, will have given little thought. Like many other elements of our digital world, it is simply a technical development that is taken for granted.

2.   For parties to exchange and reuse fully electronic messages, all information needs to be clearly defined and unambiguous, both from a semantic and syntactical perspective. Trading partners wanting to exchange data will need to agree on the meaning of each individual data element to ensure that they all understand the information in the same way. This is equally true for governments and any other parties that may use or transmit this data. If the exchange is limited to two parties, a bilateral data dictionary is sufficient. As soon as there are multiple parties, however, or if the information may be reused in other contexts, a standardized data dictionary is useful.

3.   This standardization of the base information requires the development of harmonized names, definitions and the inherent hierarchies between the individual data when considered in a business context. The UN/CEFACT provides the tools to achieve this. Its UN/CCL is a semantic encyclopaedia of all data that can potentially be exchanged in a transaction and which is updated twice annually. This model provides the base semantic definitions, the hierarchy of the data in its business context and all relevant code lists. In addition, UN/CEFACT has developed Reference Data Models (RDMs) to manage the information more coherently, providing all the information in the context of a specific sector of activity such as transport/logistics or supply chain management.

4.   All of this is even more relevant today because of the rise in e-commerce. The initiation of a transactions on a web-based portal, either by a final consumer or a company, has increased the volume of goods exchanged in smaller-sized parcels; this has also increased the volume of data exchanged. The methods to exchange information (especially for transport and regulatory processes) are the same as conventional exchanges, except for perhaps the initial online request. Given the potential increase in the number of stakeholders involved, e-commerce will reinforce the need for international standards, such as those of UN/CEFACT, to ensure that all parties are understanding the same thing in the same way.

II. Submitting actions

5.   Countries and organizations, both public and private, are invited to respond to this UNECE-UN/CEFACT *Call to Action for Improved Digitalization Through the Use of UN/CEFACT Standards* by submitting their commitments to action using the annexed template[1].

6.   This Call to Action, with its annexed template, is linked to several UN/CEFACT deliverables, including the UN/CCL and its related schema, UN/EDIFACT, the Buy-Ship-Pay RDM, the Supply Chain RDM, the Multi-Modal Transport RDM, the individual e-business standards of UN/CEFACT called Business Requirement Specifications (BRSs), and the technical specification used to develop and maintain these standards.

7.   The submitted commitments to action should concern the implementation of one or more of the following, related to UN/CEFACT deliverables:

   • Standardization of business processes;

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[1] Received and reproduced from the Bureau, as is.

- Standardization of semantics (use of a UN/CEFACT data model, i.e. UN/CCL or an RDM);

- Standardization of syntax (use of UN/CEFACT electronic business standards or syntax);

- Use of standardized code lists;

- Use of standardized technical specifications; and/or

- Use of international guidance material (UNECE recommendations, UN/CEFACT white papers, UN/CEFACT executive guides).

8.   Regarding outcomes and impact, the commitments to action should result in one or more of the following:

- A measurable time saving in data exchange;

- A measurable time saving in administrative functions;

- Enhanced data quality;

- Enhanced harmonization with partner organizations/companies;

- Reduced need for data conversion tables;

- Reduced need for human-shared documents; and/or

- Enhanced integration of processes (within a country, organization or among business partners).

9.   The proposed action(s) can include both new and existing measures and initiatives.

III.   Monitoring implementation and assessing impacts

10.   To monitor implementation, assess impacts, and facilitate experience sharing, submitters are requested to report on the implementation of their commitments to the secretariat of UN/CEFACT starting in 2022 and every two years thereafter. Commitments are to be expressed in accordance with this Call to Action, which is open to all stakeholders and actors embracing transformational change to create a sustainable digitalized environment of the future.

Annex: Template for submissions of actions

1. Submitting country, organization, company	2. Number of employees

ACTION (please record only one action per template; use separate templates for other actions)

3. Title of action (please also indicate the website, if available)

4. Partners

5. Type of initiative (please check the applicable option)
- ☐ Standardization of business process
- ☐ Standardization of semantics (use of a UN/CEFACT data model, i.e. UN/CCL or an RDM)
- ☐ Standardization of syntax (use of UN/CEFACT electronic business standards or syntax)
- ☐ Use of standardized code lists
- ☐ Use of standardized technical specifications
- ☐ Use of international guidance material (UNECE recommendations or UN/CEFACT white papers)

6. Description of action

7. UN/CEFACT tools used (please check all applicable)
- ☐ UN/CCL
- ☐ Reference Data Model (please specify which one(s) _____)
- ☐ Code lists (please specify which one(s) _____)
- ☐ E-business standards (please specify which one(s) _____)
- ☐ Technical specifications (please specify which one(s) _____)
- ☐ Guidance material (please specify which one(s) _____)

8. Scope of the action including a description of the processes that are covered (objective and commitments)

9. Timeframe and/or milestones for the action (please include when it is to be launched)

10. Expected benefits and impact for the stakeholders involved (please check all applicable)
- ☐ A measurable time saving in data exchange;
- ☐ A measurable time saving in administrative functions;
- ☐ Enhanced data quality;

☐ Enhanced harmonization with partner organizations/companies;

☐ Reduced need for data conversion tables;

☐ Enhanced integration (within a country, organization or among business partners).

11. Stakeholder scope

☐ Governmental agencies (internal processes among government agencies – G2G)

☐ Transactional to governmental agencies (transmission from private sector to government agencies – B2G)

    ☐ Single Window (see UNECE Rec. 33)

☐ Single Submission Portal solution (see UNECE Rec. 37 – B2B and/or B2G)

    ☐ Port community system (PCS)

    ☐ Cargo community system (CCS)

    ☐ Customs clearance system

    ☐ Freight forwarding system

    ☐ Integrated Services for MSME in International Trade (ISMIT) (see UN/CEFACT white paper)

☐ Business community (exchange of information between private sector business actors – B2B)

☐ Direct consumer data exchange (B2C)

12. Key performance indicators for the action (if available)

13. Good practices (if applicable, please indicate how the action has been implemented and provide a relevant website link(s))

14. How has this UNECE-UN/CEFACT Call to Action contributed to strategic engagement and/or public awareness in support of your commitment?

15. Link to relevant goal(s) and specific target(s) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda

16a. Contact name	16b. Contact telephone	16c. Contact email

17. Other comments

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