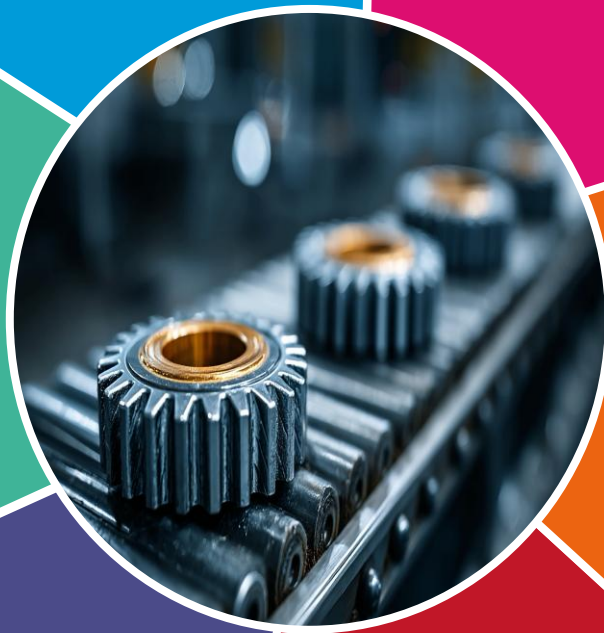


**The Role of Regulatory Cooperation
and Quality Infrastructure
in the World Development Report 2025**
Perspectives from the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory
Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6)



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About WP.6

The Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6) was founded in the 1970s as a forum for exchange on the harmonization of non-agricultural product regulations. WP.6 aims to promote regulatory cooperation, standardization policies and activities which contribute towards reducing technical barriers to trade, promoting sustainable development in all its dimensions including, for example, gender equality, climate and environmental protection, circular economy and the adaptation to new technologies.

For more information: <https://unece.org/trade/wp6>
regulatory.cooperation@un.org

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I. Introduction

The *World Development Report 2025: Standards for Development*, published by the World Bank, places standards at the center of economic development policy. The report argues that standards – rules defining quality, compatibility and measurement – constitute a form of institutional infrastructure that enables markets to function, supports productivity growth and facilitates international trade.

A central message of the report is that standards only generate development benefits when they are embedded within functioning systems of quality infrastructure. **Standards by themselves are merely texts; when supported by institutions, they become mechanisms for generating trust in markets and societies.**

This perspective represents an important conceptual shift. Traditionally, standards have often been discussed primarily as instruments for

reducing technical barriers to trade. The *World Development Report* reframes them as foundational elements of economic governance, comparable in importance to transport systems, financial institutions or digital infrastructure.

This framing resonates strongly with the work of the UNECE Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6), whose mandate focuses precisely on strengthening the institutional frameworks that allow standards to function effectively.

This note briefly explores the relationship between the analytical framework of the *World Development Report 2025* and the work of WP.6, highlighting areas where the Working Party contributes to operationalizing the report's insights.

II. Quality infrastructure as a system

One of the key contributions of the report is the recognition that standards operate within a broader institutional ecosystem commonly referred to as quality infrastructure (QI).

Quality infrastructure comprises a set of interdependent institutions and processes that ensure the credibility and reliability of standards in practice. These typically include:

- standardization systems,
- metrology,
- accreditation,
- conformity assessment, and
- market surveillance.

Together, these elements form the five pillars of quality infrastructure for trade.

The effectiveness of standards depends on the functioning of this entire ecosystem. A standard cannot deliver meaningful economic impact if

testing laboratories are not competent, if accreditation systems lack credibility, if metrology institutions cannot guarantee measurement traceability, or if market surveillance authorities are unable to ensure compliance.

In other words, it is the coherence of the system that generates trust.

The *World Development Report* emphasizes that quality infrastructure contributes not only to trade globally but also to broader economic performance. By supporting reliable measurements, testing and certification processes, **quality infrastructure enables technology diffusion, strengthens learning processes within firms and supports productivity growth.**

This broader economic perspective highlights that quality infrastructure should be understood not merely as a regulatory tool but as part of a country's innovation and productivity architecture.

III. Regulatory cooperation in an interconnected economy

A second key theme emphasized in the report is the growing interconnectedness of modern economies.

As supply chains become increasingly global, trust in products, services and institutions must extend across borders. National regulatory systems therefore cannot operate in isolation.

Regulatory cooperation – through mechanisms such as harmonized standards, mutual recognition arrangements and shared regulatory principles – plays a crucial role in ensuring that quality infrastructure systems function effectively in international markets.

Within the UNECE region, WP.6 serves as an intergovernmental forum where member States exchange experience on regulatory cooperation and quality infrastructure governance. Through its recommendations and activities, the Working Party promotes:

- risk-based regulatory frameworks,
- good regulatory practices,
- alignment with international standards,
- mutual recognition of accreditation and conformity assessment results, and
- institutional capacity-building in economies in transition.

These activities contribute directly to reducing technical barriers to trade while maintaining high levels of safety, quality and environmental protection.

Importantly, **regulatory cooperation does not eliminate national regulatory sovereignty. Rather, it provides mechanisms for managing interdependence in an increasingly integrated global economy.**

IV. Sustainability and inclusive standards systems

The World Development Report also highlights the expanding role of standards beyond traditional product regulation.

Standards increasingly shape outcomes in areas such as environmental protection, climate action, health systems, digital technologies and financial markets. As a result, the governance of standards systems has important implications for sustainable development.

Within WP.6, a particular emphasis has been placed on the inclusiveness of standards systems.

For nearly a decade, the Working Party has promoted the concept of gender-responsive standards, recognizing that technical standards have historically been developed without fully considering the needs of all segments of society.

Through its Team of Specialists on Gender-Responsive Standards, WP.6 works to ensure that standards development processes better reflect the diversity of users and stakeholders. Gender-responsive standards aim to improve safety, accessibility and fairness in products, services and systems.

In this sense, quality infrastructure contributes not only to economic efficiency but also to broader social objectives, including inclusion and equity.

At the same time, technological developments are creating new challenges for quality infrastructure systems. Digital transformation and the growing importance of traceability in sustainable value chains require regulatory frameworks that remain adaptable while maintaining trust and interoperability.

V. Strategic engagement with standards

The World Development Report proposes a strategic framework – often summarized as “Adapt, Align, Author” – to describe how countries engage with standards at different stages of development.

- **Adapt:** adopting existing international standards to facilitate market access;
- **Align:** harmonizing national regulatory systems with international frameworks; and
- **Author:** participating actively in the development of international standards.

This framework highlights that engagement with standards is not static but evolves as countries strengthen their institutional capacities.

VI. Opportunities for collaboration

The analytical framework developed in the *World Development Report* provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners working on quality infrastructure.

At the same time, **translating these insights into practical reforms requires platforms where governments, regulators and technical experts can exchange experiences and develop common approaches.**

In this regard, the work of WP.6 complements the analytical perspective of the World Bank. The Working Party provides a forum where member States can discuss regulatory challenges, develop guidance and share best practices related to quality infrastructure governance.

VII. Conclusion

The *World Development Report 2025* highlights the central role of standards and quality infrastructure in modern economic development.

If development ultimately depends on trust – trust in products, markets, institutions and international partners – then standards represent one of the key languages through which that trust is expressed.

Quality infrastructure provides the institutional framework that ensures this language remains credible.

In practice, many countries focus initially on adopting internationally recognized standards to facilitate trade. Over time, regulatory cooperation and institutional development allow them to align their regulatory systems more closely with international frameworks. Ultimately, participation in international standard-setting processes enables countries to influence the rules shaping future technologies and markets.

Platforms such as WP.6 can support countries particularly in the first two stages – adaptation and alignment – by facilitating dialogue, sharing best practices and strengthening institutional capacity.

Recent cooperation between WP.6 and the World Bank – including participation in conferences and policy dialogues – illustrates the potential for further collaboration in areas such as:

- capacity-building for quality infrastructure systems,
- strengthening governance frameworks for regulatory cooperation,
- promoting inclusive standards development, and
- supporting countries in integrating into global markets.

By promoting regulatory cooperation, strengthening quality infrastructure systems and encouraging inclusive standards development, WP.6 contributes to building that framework of trust across borders.

In an increasingly complex and interconnected global economy, such cooperation may become more important than ever.