

Why a Standards Toolkit is Needed

Organisations involved in developing standards devote much time and effort in creating rules, guidelines and best practices to simplify and harmonize how trade and supply chain data are produced and exchanged machine-to-machine. Some users may not be aware of all the existing standards on trade digitalisation. This Standards Toolkit provides a starting point to guide users in their digitalisation journey.

The objective is to drive adoption of existing standards and to facilitate trusted, real-time supply chain collaboration and real-time standard data exchange, while reducing costs and complexity.

To reduce friction and to enable scale in digital exchanges, there is a need to standardise the digital language and medium of exchange when using standardised trade-related documents and data formats. In this toolkit, 'data standard' refers to standards that define the core elements of an electronic record representing that specific trade document, whereas 'data format/exchange standard' refers to standards that help to facilitate the data exchange between different systems owned by different actors in the supply chain.

The aim is to help the international trade community realise the benefits of paperless trade flows, by facilitating and embracing the seamless data connectivity between supply chain parties. Everyone everywhere benefits from full visibility in the global supply chain.

Using this Standards Toolkit

There is a need to move digitisation beyond digital documents (e.g. PDF) whose content still needs to be processed manually at the receiving end. The opportunity exists to enable more effective, automated information sharing and reuse within the supply chain by enabling all parties to speak the same language by leveraging the same set of the standard data description and standard data exchange structure which can then be interpreted in the same way, regardless of the tools chosen to create the machine-readable format.

For instance, governments around the world have been introducing e-invoicing mandates to streamline tax payments, moving away from manual processes. The commercial invoice standard includes common business terms and business rules that enable trade partners to understand all the data content in the same way, and the ways in which structured invoices between a seller and buyer in an electronic format can be automatically exchanged without manual intervention.

It is important to note that this toolkit does not provide an exhaustive list of all standards available but does list some of the most notable and widely used standards as a starting point to facilitate interoperability among the most supply chain actors. The aim is to continually improve and expand, or update the coverage to ensure the toolkit remains relevant to all intended users.

While Sections 1 and 2 of the toolkit are transversal in nature, Sections 3-5 are intended to be starting toolkits for various types of supply chain actors. Section 6 on Interoperable Digitisation Frameworks shows the possible pathways to enable interoperability across sectors and borders.