Preface

The greatest challenges countries face today transcend national borders. The threats posed by climate change, health epidemics, terrorism, tax evasion, illicit financial flows, as well as social and economic crises all have global causes and effects. A multilateral approach is essential in delivering a sustainable world economy.

It is true that in recent years, we have made great progress in fostering international consensus and action in a number of areas: 2015 saw major agreements on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and on climate change at COP21, to name just two notable examples. At the same time, many countries are experiencing mounting nationalism and facing the concerns of those who feel left behind by globalisation.

In this context, international organisations have a key role to play in promoting multilateral solutions, while respecting the specificities of individual nations. They are well-placed to help governments address the fragmentation that can undermine domestic and regional action, while their institutional setting allows countries to work together to develop joint approaches. The technical expertise of international organisations can also support policy makers to identify and deliver ambitious, innovative and tailored policy responses.

However, despite this obvious potential, international organisations may be limited in their ability to deliver on their mandate for a variety of reasons. They can be burdened by excessive procedures. They may in some instances lack effectiveness or coordination. Ultimately, structured evidence on their impacts remains limited, casting doubt on the relevance of their action.

International Regulatory Co-operation: The Role of International Organisations seeks to fill this gap and to set out the practices and impacts of today's most prominent global standard setters. The study has built on the inputs and co-operation of 50 international organisations to collect, compare and assess practices on governance arrangements, operational modalities, use of quality management disciplines and co-operation efforts. To account for the variety of today's global standard setting, the report analyses different types of organisations – inter-governmental, supra-national, trans-governmental and private – and identifies avenues for making their action more effective, inclusive and relevant.

The study reveals the diversity of international organisations involved in standard-setting and rule-making activities. However, it also underlines the significant commonalities embedded in international rule-making: the increasing reliance on non-binding instruments; the need for greater inclusiveness, transparency and relevance in an ever changing world; the difficulties of monitoring implementation and evaluating the impacts of international standards and legal instruments. Ultimately, despite the great variety of mandates and the scope of actions, international organisations operate in an institutionally-crowded area, in which relevance, flexibility, focus and efficiency are a concern for all.

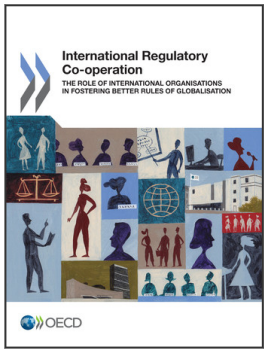
At the OECD, we believe that it should be the strategic priority of all international organisations to strengthen the impacts and outcomes of the standards they produce and to identify areas where new or revised global standards are needed. To address this challenge, we have launched a comprehensive review of the OECD's legal instruments with a view to ensuring they continue to offer relevant and effective standards and best practices and to respond, in a timely manner, to the needs of governments.

The evidence provided by the study, together with the five case studies detailing the governance and activities of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO); the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO); the International Organisation of Legal Metrology (OIML), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the World Health Organisation (WHO), is an important step in helping us understand how we can improve our contribution to a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable world.

Collectively, international organisations across the globe can build on their respective experience in standard setting, coordinate their action and combine their technical expertise to remain relevant on the global scale. It is our shared responsibility to rebuild trust in the international architecture and in its capacity to deliver better policies for better lives.

Angel Gurría,

OECD Secretary-General



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