SmartSuite

Framework / Supply Chain Security / Other

United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT): recommendations and e-business standards

UN/CEFACT, a UNECE subsidiary body, develops the voluntary trade facilitation recommendations and e-business...

What it is

UN/CEFACT, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, is the subsidiary intergovernmental body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). It develops the UNECE trade facilitation recommendations and the UN/CEFACT e-business standards used across international supply chains. Those standards include UN/EDIFACT, the Core Component Library, the XML Schema Library, the reference data models such as Buy-Ship-Pay, UN/LOCODE and the JSON-LD web vocabulary. Importers, exporters, carriers, forwarders, banks, customs authorities and software providers use them.

At a glance

PUBLISHER United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), a subsidiary body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)	TYPE Standard	VERSION Programme of Work 2025-2026
EFFECTIVE 1996	DOMAIN Supply Chain Security	FAMILY Other
REGION Global (UNECE, Geneva)	ADOPTION MODEL Voluntary	IMPLEMENTATION COMPLEXITY Medium

Source: unece.org/trade/uncefact

Why it matters

- **One free, global source** Paragraph 23 of the 2017 mandate requires the Plenary to approve recommendations and standards under the Open Development Process and to make them freely available; paragraph 25 adds publication in English, French and Russian.
- **Dated releases** The 2024 Plenary report lists the Core Component Library 23B and 24A, UN/EDIFACT D.23A and D.24A and UN/LOCODE 2023-1 and 2023-2 (paragraph 57), so every implementation can name its version.
- **Public and private participation** Member States nominate Heads of Delegation; experts serve in their own right (paragraph 18); 1,618 experts were registered in 2024 (2024 report, paragraph 50).
- **Interoperability with customs** The WCO Data Model is built on UN/CEFACT standards, and the Buy-Ship-Pay Reference Data Model is being mapped to it for WCO Data Model version 4.3 (2025 report, paragraph 93).

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How SmartSuite supports UN/CEFACT

UN/CEFACT Instrument Register

Record every recommendation, directory, library, reference data model and code list in use with its release, the Plenary decision or report that published it and the systems that implement it.

Trading Partner Requirements

Capture per partner or authority which messages, versions and code lists are required, the go-live date and the contact, and link each to the obligation it creates.

Release Change Control

Track the twice-yearly UN/EDIFACT, Core Component Library and UN/LOCODE releases, assess impact on live interfaces and route approved changes through testing and release evidence.

Interoperability Test Evidence

Store test results and partner confirmations for each message implementation and release, so a question from a customs authority or bank is answered from the record.

Traceability and Transparency Obligations

Hold the Recommendation No. 49 practices and any digital product passport or due diligence data requests as obligations with owners, data sources and evidence.

Plenary and Program Tracking

Log the annual Plenary decisions, the Programme of Work focus areas and open projects that affect your instruments, and schedule the reviews they trigger.

Common framework mappings

ISO 28000 | NIST SP 800-161 Rev.1 | WCO Data Model

Official resources

UN/CEFACT Supply Chain Standards Framework

Defines international standards for secure and efficient data exchange in global supply chains.

unece.org/trade/uncefact

UN/CEFACT mandate and terms of reference (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/15)

The consolidated mandate, terms of reference and procedures of UN/CEFACT as approved by its 23rd Plenary in April 2017.

documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g17/010/28/pdf/g1701028.pdf

Report of the UN/CEFACT Plenary, 31st session (July 2025)

The report of the July 2025 Plenary: decisions, the program of work and the standards and recommendations noted or approved.

documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g25/131/54/pdf/g2513154.pdf

UN/CEFACT on GitHub

The UN/CEFACT organization on GitHub, where its vocabulary, reference data models and project repositories are published.

github.com/uncefact

Frequently asked questions

What is UN/CEFACT, and who runs it?

UN/CEFACT, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, is a subsidiary intergovernmental body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, placed under the overall guidance of the UNECE Executive Committee in April 2013 (2017 mandate, paragraph 8). Its original mandate, TRADE/R.650, was approved in September and December 1996. A Plenary of Member State delegations is the highest authority, an elected Bureau of a Chair and at least four Vice Chairs acts between sessions, and experts nominated by Heads of Delegation do the project work in their own right (paragraphs 13, 14, 18 and 35).

Which standards does UN/CEFACT publish?

The UNECE trade facilitation recommendations (Recommendation No. 1 onward, with Recommendation No. 49 approved in July 2025) and the e-business standards: the UN/EDIFACT directories (D.23A and D.24A in the 2024 Plenary report), the Core Component Library and XML Schema Library (versions 23B and 24A), the reference data models including Buy-Ship-Pay and the Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model, the UN/LOCODE location code list (releases 2023-1, 2023-2 and 2024-1) and the JSON-LD web vocabulary, together with business requirements specifications and white papers (2024 report, paragraphs 55 to 58).

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Are UN/CEFACT standards mandatory?

No. They are recommendations and standards of a United Nations body, approved by the Plenary and made freely available (2017 mandate, paragraph 23). They become binding when a customs authority, port community system, bank or trading partner requires a particular message, library release or code list, or when national law adopts them. The practical obligation is therefore defined by the partner's or authority's requirement, which names the instrument and its version.

How are UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards approved?

Through the Open Development Process (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2016/17). A project proposal needs written expressions of support from three country Heads of Delegation; the Bureau launches it, appoints project leaders and monitors progress (2017 mandate, paragraphs 39(e) and 46); the Plenary then approves the deliverable, by consensus where possible (paragraph 16). The 31st Plenary used this route to approve Recommendation No. 49 by consensus on July 4, 2025 (Decision 25-04).

What did the 2024 and 2025 Plenaries decide?

The 30th Plenary (July 11 and 12, 2024) approved the Programme of Work 2025-2026 (Decision 24-12), took note of the new library and directory releases (Decision 24-08) and endorsed the UN/LOCODE Advisory Group report (Decision 24-10). The 31st Plenary (July 3 and 4, 2025) approved Recommendation No. 49 on transparency at scale (Decision 25-04), welcomed the digital connectivity workstream including Recommendation No. 50 (Decision 25-06), and asked the Bureau to present the Programme of Work 2027-2028 at its next session (Decision 25-11).

License included / downloadable: Yes UN/CEFACT recommendations and standards are approved by the Plenary and made freely available to users under paragraph 23 of the 2017 mandate; the directories, libraries, schemas and code lists are published on the UNECE site and in open-source repositories, and the Plenary reports are on documents.un.org.

Full framework page and mappings: smartsuite.com/frameworks/un-cefact-supply-chain-standards