



CEN – European Committee for Standardization
CENELEC – European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization

LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE **COVID-19** PANDEMIC





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Foreword

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented CEN and CENELEC with a variety of unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The aim of this report is to share with our stakeholders what we have learned from these experiences to improve our overall organizational resilience. Given the unique role European Standards play for the European economy and single market, we believe that these lessons learned can be of interest to a wider audience.

Through the standards that we develop and the networks we facilitate, CEN and CENELEC effectively operate as intermediaries between the worlds of industry, technological innovation, international trade and public regulation in Europe. This unique position has allowed CEN and CENELEC Members to play an essential role in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, notably by facilitating alternative ways of producing PPE (personal protective equipment) and essential medical devices (e.g. ventilators) and providing clarity to stakeholders. Critical European Standards have been used by manufacturers to temporarily reconfigure their production lines to support the supply of much needed medical equipment for healthcare professionals and patients. In consultation with CEN and CENELEC Members, the European Commission, the International Standardization Organization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), these standards have exceptionally been made freely available by CEN and CENELEC Members, providing a committed and unified response in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the report offers many examples of opportunities emerging from the crisis, one silver lining clearly stands out: European Standards, while often invisible, are a readily available and valuable resource for quick and reliable solutions, especially in times of crisis. Indeed, standards build trust, now more than ever.

Yours Sincerely,



Vincent Laflèche
President CEN



Dany Sturtewagen
*President
CENELEC*

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Introduction

The “lessons learned” presented in this report are based on the joint experiences of the CEN and CENELEC Members during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. By sharing these insights, we aim to highlight the critical role that the European standardization system played in tackling the early challenges of the pandemic, while also taking stock of valuable lessons learned throughout the crisis. These reflections and analyses are meant to further enhance our organisational resilience in the face of future challenges.

This report is based largely on the work done by the CEN and CENELEC COVID-19 Crisis Management Network (CMN), an ad hoc crisis-response network of national crisis-coordinators, established in March 2020. Through the CMN, CEN and CENELEC Members not only managed to identify and address emerging issues of common concern, the network also provided a platform to exchange best practices swiftly and efficiently over different working areas affected by the crisis.

The report is structured around four critical lessons learned; each presents forward-looking, organisational considerations, based on the impacts and best practices identified by our Members at both national and European level.

Lessons learned from the **COVID-19** crisis

1. Fast track digital transformation



Many of CEN and CENELEC's key take-aways from the COVID-19 crisis so far concerned issues pertaining to human and technological resource management. In particular, the need to **upscale and fast track ongoing digitalisation and ICT initiatives** has been highlighted. In line with the commitments articulated in the newly adopted CEN and CENELEC Strategy 2030, the digital transformation of our tools, services and processes will constitute a major change in how we operate and create value for our customers and stakeholders in the future.

As standardizers, **ensuring business continuity and providing stability to the stakeholders** who rely on us **has been a priority since day one** of the crisis. This implied offering flexibility and reliable development platforms, so that technical bodies could continue their standardization work online, in a safe, responsive and well-integrated working environment.

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While the agility and resilience demonstrated by our staff and technical experts has been impressive, the crisis has clearly increased the need for flexible and responsive standardization processes. CEN and CENELEC will therefore invest more in the development of **user-friendly digital platforms for the efficient, collaborative authoring of standards online**, making the best use of modern technologies to enable virtual standards development, while increasing the speed of development. These measures embrace similar initiatives undertaken at the international level at ISO and IEC and reflect our strategic commitment to fully embrace digital standardization.

At the national level, a large majority of our Members indicate that they will continue to increase their operations online, noting the removal of barriers for stakeholders to join meetings, as well as considerable cost and time savings as key arguments for an increase in virtual meetings. Many of the CEN and CENELEC Members emphasized that virtual services and working environments go **beyond technological innovations**, however, and highlight the value of bringing people physically together for certain purposes, including brainstorming, trust-building and sensitive decision-making. The importance of social interaction, transparent communication, and continuous skill and performance management were all identified as key requirements towards keeping staff and stakeholders engaged and motivated.

In sum, while a future without online meetings and development processes may no longer be imaginable, there is a clearly identified **need for smart mixes** between virtual and physical engagement, making the best use of both formats.

2. Explore resilient business models



Overall, CEN and CENELEC Members have shown **exceptional agility in adapting to the rapidly changing needs of stakeholders and standards users**. Many managed to build a business case around newly-developed services and materials, including consulting services, helplines, sectorial guides, dedicated webinars and training sessions.

While these services were initially aimed primarily at mitigating the health impacts of the crisis, these initiatives later focused on the evolving sectoral challenges related to restarting economic activities in 'the new normal' in a safe and secure manner. In many cases, the crisis urged Members to move out of their comfort zones and to innovate the services and products they offered their stakeholders and customers in a flexible and responsive manner.

While emphasising the exceptional nature of temporarily making certain standards freely available as part of a crisis-response measure as well as taking into account the wide diversity in financing and business models used among CEN and CENELEC Members, Members also indicated an **openness to explore alternative, sustainable business models in the face of potential future crises**.

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Indeed, the **crisis has helped to expose several vulnerabilities** in our present financing and business models, urging a further exploration of alternative, more resilient revenue bases. This complements earlier commitments identified in the CEN and CENELEC Strategy 2030 regarding the exploration of crisis-resilient and future-proof business models in the digital era.

3. Enhance stakeholder and policy engagement



Presenting everyone with unprecedented challenges, the **COVID-19 crisis has emphasised the need for, and value of, close stakeholder engagement**. CEN and CENELEC Members reported such enhanced engagement, both in terms of quality and dynamics. We further find that the crisis helped demonstrate and make tangible the real-life use and value of standards to a variety of stakeholder audiences.

As the pandemic unfolded across Europe during the first half of 2020, CEN and CENELEC received a high number of questions and requests from a variety of stakeholders at both the European and national level. While such questions often varied across technical and regulatory issues, overall, they reflected an **urgent need for clear and concise information**. Such clarity was particularly pressing for economic actors looking to diverge their production lines or looking to put much needed PPE or medical devices on the single market. To help support such processes, CEN and



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CENELEC put together a list of Frequently Asked Questions, collected at the national and European level, which was then developed into a dedicated COVID-19 landing page with useful information and referrals to the relevant private and public entities¹.

CEN and CENELEC further experienced a **noticeable increase and closeness in its engagement with policymakers and regulatory authorities**. At the European level, high-level discussions with the Cabinet of Commissioner Breton and other Commission services led to a series of concrete actions and initiatives that made a crucial contribution in the fight against the pandemic. One example that stands out is the development of CWA 17553² on “Community face coverings – a Guide to minimum requirements, methods of testing and use” in record time³. Beyond these concrete measures, we argue, these joint endeavours ultimately fostered a **better mutual understanding** of longstanding sensitive issues of concern.

At the national level as well, many CEN and CENELEC members echo these findings, reporting a noticeable **enhancement in the working relations with national and regional regulatory authorities and policymakers**, many of whom, they note, had struggled to recognise and understand the value and use of standardization in the past.

In conclusion, we find that **the COVID-19 crisis has led to a more tangible and comprehensive understanding of the value and use of standards for both markets and society at large**. Due to the inherently technical and omnipresent nature of standards, this is often overlooked and difficult to communicate.

1. Including, for instance, a set of comparative analyses between European and Chinese standards, developed by Technical Committee experts from all over Europe on very short notice.
2. https://www.cencenelec.eu/News/Press_Releases/Pages/PR-2020-004.aspx
3. https://www.cencenelec.eu/research/CWA/Documents/CWA17553_2020.pdf



4. Foster international cooperation and alignment



The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of **information sharing and responsive, seamless cooperation at the international level**. This is particularly notable with ISO and IEC, but also vis-à-vis third party (non-European) standard development organisations (SDO).

It is worth noting in this regard that a growing number of national and regional standardizers issued **requests to adopt European Standards** in their fight against COVID-19, particularly for standards related to PPE. Interestingly, several CEN and CENELEC Members emphasised their role as **knowledge brokers** and intermediaries for foreign partners, including national and regional authorities. Such interactions focused on issues concerning EU market access, the technical equivalence of standards and cooperation with (international) health organisations in support of the fight against the pandemic.

CEN and CENELEC firmly subscribe to the ‘international first’ principle, acknowledging the prerogative and added value of international standards. They also highly value the **close and responsive collaboration** we have maintained with the ISO and IEC under particularly challenging circumstances. Many of CEN and CENELEC’s experiences and lessons learned from the crisis have been shared and



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taken on board at the international level and will further contribute to the resilience and crisis-responsiveness of the international standardization system.

Finally, while digital meetings greatly facilitated the opportunity to meet and engage with international partners on particularly short notice, several Members indicated they missed the **informal human interactions required to build relationships based on trust**. As such, smart combinations of physical and virtual meetings will be developed to help facilitate international engagements in the future.

In sum, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted once again the **critical added value of a strong international standardization system, as well as close cooperation and alignment between the European and the international level**. In line with its strategic commitments in this regard under the Strategy 2030, CEN and CENELEC will further bolster their ambitions to be a progressive, leading voice in the global standardization community.

CEN and CENELEC are part of a dynamic ecosystem, a global standardization community that is constantly evolving in response to the ever-changing needs of our societies, a fast-moving global economy and the rapid rate of technological innovation. CEN and CENELEC are determined to be at the forefront of these evolutions and take on a **progressive, leading role in the global standardization community**.

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ABOUT

CEN (European Committee for Standardization) and CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization) are recognized by the European Union (EU) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as European Standardization Organizations responsible for developing standards at European level, as per the EU Regulation 1025/2012. The members of CEN and CENELEC are the National Standardization Bodies and National Electrotechnical Committees of 34 European countries. European Standards (ENs) and other standardization deliverables adopted by CEN and CENELEC, are accepted and recognized in all these countries.

European Standards (ENs) contribute to enhancing safety, improving quality, facilitating cross-border trade and strengthening the European Single Market. They are developed through a process of collaboration among experts nominated by business and industry, research institutes, consumer and environmental organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders. CEN and CENELEC work to promote the international alignment of standards in the framework of technical cooperation agreements with ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and the IEC (International Electrotechnical Commission).

** Number of full members in May 2020*

CEN – European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization
CENELEC – European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization
Rue de la Science, 23 | B – 1040 Brussels – Belgium | info@cencenelec.eu
www.cencenelec.eu

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Participation in the standardization process allows stakeholders to have a say on the content of draft standards and enables them to be better informed about developments in standards relevant to their area of interest or sector of activity. Companies, public bodies and other (national) organizations, wishing to participate in CEN activities should contact the CEN Member (National Standardization Body - NSB) or CENELEC Member (National Committee - NC) in their country. By contacting the NSB or NC, these organizations can either participate in the national mirror committee responsible for providing input to the relevant Technical Committee (TC) at European level, or be put forward by their NSB/NC to be an active member of a European Standardization Committee/Working Group.

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