

Uniting the world to tackle climate change: COP26 and the commitments of European Standards

October 2021

Background Information

Since 1995, the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change have met annually to agree action to prevent dangerous levels of anthropogenic climate change caused by emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide. Today just short of 200 nations are parties to the UNFCCC. Since the signature of the Paris Agreement in 2015, countries around the world have set specific targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so as to limit global warming to +1.5°C compared to pre-industrial levels.

This year, six years after the Paris Agreement was signed, the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will gather in Glasgow to build upon the four goals promoted by the UK Presidency in partnership with Italy. These goals are securing global net zero and maintaining the objective of limiting the rise in global temperatures to +1.5°C; urgently adapt to protect communities and natural habitats; mobilising finance and working together to deliver these objectives.

The goals will be addressed in a conference, which is further supported by parallel side events in Brussels that will be livestreamed into the main conference. On this occasion, CEN and CENELEC will co-host a session on the role of European standards in achieving climate neutrality for businesses. All countries of the CEN and CENELEC membership as well as the European Union are parties to the UNFCCC and have signed and ratified the Paris Agreement.

CEN and CENELEC recognise that climate change is the most serious threat we face in current times. Addressing this threat is an urgent priority for our standardization work and a core driver for our CEN-CENELEC Strategy 2030. The 34 National Standardization Organizations that make up our membership together with the over 200,000 technical experts that lead the work of our committees are united in addressing the global challenge of climate change.

International based or internationally adopted European standards play an essential role in supporting the ambition of the Paris Agreement and global policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and reach net-zero, including the United Nations 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Union's Green Deal. The achievement of these ambitions will require a collaborative approach at the international and European level to deliver climate-friendly standards.

Without climate compatible international and European Standards, industry and other stakeholders will be unable to achieve what is necessary to help mitigate, reduce and adapt to climate change, deliver the ambitions for clean, affordable and resilient energy, support circular economy across sectors, or enable smart and sustainable mobility. A standard is not just a formal, voluntary document that sets specifications – drafting a standard is also the opportunity for experts to participate in an inclusive system that builds consensus on the state of the art and fosters an ecosystem for innovation.

Standards foster the process of innovation and encourage the faster development of more environmentally friendly technologies and materials. Whether it is by specifying tests or providing robust definitions that avoid misleading environmental claims, standards have a key role to play in addressing the climate emergency. What's more, the alignment of European and international standards helps to ensure that the results of innovation are more quickly delivered to global markets.

CEN and CENELEC, in the framework of our respective agreements with our sister organizations at the international level ISO under the Vienna Agreement and IEC under the Frankfurt Agreement, help to ensure that, as standards are developed, products and services take into account fundamental societal and environmental impacts. In this respect, the members of ISO and the IEC Council Board recently approved the London Declaration, a commitment to ensure that international standards accelerate achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, the UN SDGs and the UN Call for Action on Adaptation and Resilience. This commitment includes the active consideration of climate science in the development of all new and revised international standards, and the facilitation of the involvement of civil society and those most vulnerable to climate change in the development of international standards.

Climate change is an existential challenge for humanity. The European standards community stands ready to play its part in ensuring that Europe and the world is equipped to deliver the social and economic transition necessary to reduce the effects of climate change while also helping to deliver the infrastructure necessary to increase the planet's resilience to adapt to its impacts.

ABOUT CEN AND CENELEC

CEN (European Committee for Standardization) and CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization) are recognised 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 European Regulation 1025/2012. The members are the National Standards Bodies (CEN) and National Electrotechnical Committees (CENELEC) from 34 European countries. European Standards (ENs) and other standardization deliverables are adopted by CEN and CENELEC, are accepted and recognized in all of these countries. These standards contribute to enhancing safety, improving quality, facilitating cross-border trade and strengthening of the European Single Market. They are developed through a process of collaboration among experts nominated by business and industry, research institutions, consumer and environmental organizations, trade unions and other societal 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).