



Including SMEs in standardisation

How business associations and standards organisations can help to raise awareness among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) about standards, provide them with relevant information, and promote their participation in standardisation.

Standards make life easier and safer for businesses and consumers. They are useful for improving performance, protecting the health and safety of consumers and workers, respecting the environment and enabling companies to comply with relevant laws and regulations.

Standards facilitate the introduction of new technologies and innovations, and ensure that products, components and services supplied by different companies will be mutually compatible.

Moreover, standards help to open-up markets by allowing customers to compare offers from different suppliers, thereby making it easier for smaller and younger enterprises to compete with larger and more long-established companies.

At European level, common standards are developed for all kinds of products and services across a wide range of sectors such as chemicals, construction, energy, food, health and safety, household appliances, information technology, machinery, telecommunications and transport – just to give a few examples.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined as companies with fewer than 250 employees. They represent 98% of all businesses in Europe and employ more than 90 million people in the EU. Despite this, SMEs are less likely than larger companies to get actively involved in the development of standards.

In order to ensure that standards meet the needs of smaller companies, it is necessary that SMEs are provided with information about standardisation activities, and that their interests are properly represented during the development, drafting and revision of standards. Both standards organisations and business associations¹ – especially those representing SMEs – have important roles to play.

This publication sets out a series of recommendations concerning ways in which business associations and standards organisations can work together at both national and European levels, with the aim of making the standardisation process better understood by, and more accessible to, small and medium-sized companies.

These recommendations are based on examples of good practice that were identified in a number of different countries throughout Europe.

1. In this context, 'business associations' refers to all membership-based organisations that serve and represent private companies, including (but not necessarily limited to) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

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Making Standardisation accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): 10 things that business associations and standards organisations can do

1 Establish good contacts and communication between standards organisations and business associations representing SMEs.

A continuous exchange of information is necessary to make sure that business associations know about standards and standardisation activities that could be relevant for their members. At the same time, it is also important that standards organisations are informed about the needs and concerns of companies that are active in each sector. Business associations at national level should aim to be in regular contact with the person(s) within their national standards organisation who is/are responsible for the specific sector(s) in which their members are active. Similarly, business associations at European level need to be in contact with the right person(s) within the European Standards Organisations (CEN, CENELEC and/or ETSI).

2 Create forums for regular dialogue between standards organisations and business associations representing SMEs.

A number of national standards organisations already have specific committees or working groups that are dedicated to considering the needs and concerns of SMEs, and making sure that these are taken into account in the framework of ongoing and/or future standardisation activities. Such forums are useful for maintaining a permanent dialogue with business associations representing SMEs, sharing information on recent and forthcoming developments across different sectors, and addressing horizontal issues that are relevant to more than one sector. They are most effective when they meet on a regular basis.

3 Coordinate the collection and sharing of information about standards and standardisation activities.

Within each business association, it is necessary to closely monitor developments relating to standards that could be of interest to members, and to coordinate the participation of the association and its members in standardisation activities. Many business associations have specific committees that are responsible for carrying out these functions, and ensuring that relevant information is provided to members. This is especially valuable for SMEs, which in most cases do not have the capacity to monitor all standards-related developments that might affect their business activities.

4 Ensure that the needs and wishes of SMEs are taken into account.

Standardisation activities are normally open to all stakeholders that wish to participate. However, many small businesses do not have the capacity and/or resources to actively (or even passively) contribute to standardisation. Business associations therefore have a vital role to play in making sure that their members' interests are represented during the development, drafting and revision of relevant standards – at national level and also at European or international level.

5 Make relevant information available in the language(s) of each country.

For reasons of cost, it is not always possible for national standards organisations to ensure that all standards are available in the official language(s) of every country. Business associations can help by providing information about standards and standardisation activities to their members, and identifying which standards should be given priority for translation.

6 Organise trainings that are relevant for small and medium-sized companies.

Various kinds of training events such as seminars and workshops are being organised by standards organisations, often in partnership with business associations at local, regional, national and European levels. These trainings provide valuable opportunities for managers and professionals working for SMEs to learn about standards and standardisation. They may focus on specific subjects of particular interest to SMEs, or to companies active in a certain sector.

7 Produce practical guides to inform businesses about how to use and implement standards.

Many business associations and industry organisations prepare and publish guides to inform their members about relevant standards, the benefits of using them, and how to implement them. Such guides are particularly useful for SMEs, especially when they are tailored to the needs of businesses that are active in a specific sector. They also contribute to increasing awareness and understanding of standards and standardisation in general.

8 Develop online tools that make information about standards accessible to SMEs.

Standards organisations are using the internet to make it easier for companies to find information about standards relevant to their sector. Online tools can also enable SMEs to learn about upcoming and ongoing standardisation activities, and take part in online consultations on draft standards. Business associations have a role to play in making sure that their members are aware of what tools exist and how they can take full advantage of them.

9 Provide advice and expertise that corresponds to the specific needs of SMEs.

Business associations are providing their members with relevant information and guidance on all kinds of issues related to standards and standardisation. They are well placed to deal with specific enquiries and liaise between individual companies and standards organisations. Smaller companies in particular count on business associations to provide them with accurate answers and appropriate advice.

10 Offer bundles of standards that are relevant for SMEs in specific sectors.

Standards organisations can collaborate with business associations to offer services such as bundles, packages and subscriptions that are tailored to meet the needs SMEs, and which make it easier (and less expensive) for them to purchase the standards they wish to obtain. User-friendly formats such as pocket-sized guides can also make standards more accessible.





European Standards: opening-up the Single Market for business

Standards have an especially valuable role to play in the framework of the European Single Market (or European Economic Area), which includes all the member states of the European Union plus a number of neighbouring countries. In order for the single market to function effectively, standards must be harmonised so that products and services can be sold and purchased across borders.

European Standards are identified by the code 'EN'. They are recognised throughout 33 European countries, where there is an obligation to withdraw any national standard that is not compatible with an EN. This means that any component, product or service which conforms with the relevant European Standards should be accepted in all of the participating countries.

Three European Standards Organisations (ESOs) are recognised as having the capacity and expertise necessary to develop European Standards (ENs). These are: CEN (European Committee for Standardization); CENELEC (European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization); and ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute).

European Standards (ENs) are developed through a process of collaboration among technical experts nominated by business and industry, research institutes, consumer and environmental organisations and other societal stakeholders. In CEN and CENELEC, these standards are adopted by means of a voting procedure involving national standards organisations.

**This publication has been produced as part of the
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For more information about this project see: www.smest.eu

European SMEST partners

**CEN - European Committee for
Standardization**

**CENELEC - European Committee for
Electrotechnical Standardization**

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European Commission - DG Enterprise

[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/
index_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/index_en.htm)

European Small Business Portal

[http://ec.europa.eu/small-business/
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www.efta.int

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www.normapme.eu