



# **Consumer Priorities in International Standardization Work**

## **Priority Programme**

### ***Handbook***

**ISO Committee on Consumer Policy  
(COPOLCO)**



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## **ISO/COPOLCO – Priority Programme – Handbook**

### **Introduction**

The Working Group on Priorities is a standing committee of ISO/COPOLCO, which sets priorities in current or proposed areas of standardization as seen from the consumers' point of view. Recognizing that not all areas of standardization are of direct relevance to consumers, this Working Group helps COPOLCO to achieve its strategic objectives by identifying new areas of standardization activity and providing feedback about current standardization and conformity assessment activities.

ISO/COPOLCO relies on the resources within ISO member countries for consumer representation on technical committees and has limited resources itself for the co-ordination of these activities. Hence, there is a need to identify standards development work of consumer interest and to co-ordinate consumer participation into areas of highest priority and to ensure that optimal use is made of available consumer resources. To manage this activity, the Working Group on Priorities was established. This Working Group helps to give visibility to consumer representation in international standardization and to the role COPOLCO plays to support it.

### **Purpose and Scope of Handbook**

This handbook provides the framework for the COPOLCO Working Group on Priorities to set priorities, monitor progress and report on ISO/IEC technical committees on the developing and amending of standards and technical reports that contain matters of consumer interest. This handbook also assists in co-ordinating matters of consumer interest under discussion in appropriate ISO/IEC technical committees.

The purpose of this handbook is two-fold:

- 1) to raise awareness and foster interest in consumer issues and consumer participation in standards work by providing information about key consumer priorities and highlighting the status of standards work of importance to consumers worldwide, and
- 2) to serve as a reference and guidance tool to those involved in consumer policy activities and consumer representation to enhance the coordination and impact of this work.

This handbook provides information about how the ISO/COPOLCO Working Group on Priorities identifies priority areas of interest to consumers that are appropriate for international standardization and sets out the responsibilities and roles of those involved in COPOLCO's Priority Programme. Also included are:

- template for submitting issues for consideration by the Working Group
- list of relevant publications and references

In addition to the Handbook, the Working Group produces an Annual Report, which contains detailed information about the current priority areas and the status of technical committee work in these areas. This information can be used by national standards bodies and other organizations when they are considering their priorities for participation in the development of international standards. This Annual Report also contains a list of key persons and areas of interest.

Each year, COPOLCO sets priorities on aspects of technical work within ISO or IEC of most interest to consumers. While all the priorities identified are deemed “**important**”, COPOLCO allocates its areas of priority interest for consumers into two categories. They are:

**Key or emerging priorities:** new areas of technical work, or fields with new implications for consumers;

**Watching brief priorities:** mature areas of work which have or have had active and successful consumer representation - consumer issues have been addressed to a large extent and/or have been reassessed by the Working Group as a lesser global priority at present.

COPOLCO work on the development and amendment of ISO/IEC Guides is outside the scope of the Working Group on Priorities, although the Working Group may from time to time recommend that new Guides should be developed or existing Guides should be amended or updated.

## **Terms of Reference – Working Group on Priorities**

The Working Group on Priorities operates as a standing committee under the authority of ISO/COPOLCO. Each year the Working Group evaluates and updates its current programme and processes to ensure alignment with the current range of concerns that ISO/COPOLCO is addressing. While the overall mandate of the WG remains constant, the focus and processes for the WG are regularly updated to reflect the current environment for consumer policy in standards work.

### **Mandate:**

The objectives of the COPOLCO Working Group on Priorities are as follows:

- To identify and monitor key standards work of interest to consumers; including emerging areas, horizontal issues, and mature technical committee work;
- Raise awareness and provide information about areas of priority to: ISO/COPOLCO members, consumer organizations and consumer representatives, standards development organizations, and members of Technical Committees and Subcommittees;
- To provide information to facilitate networking amongst individuals interested in priority areas,
- To take into account the needs of developing countries and emerging economies, and
- To encourage national standards bodies and other relevant organizations, such as Consumers International, to include consumer representatives on appropriate technical committees.

As COPOLCO relies on the resources of member bodies to facilitate consumer representation on technical committees and at the national level, the WG recommends priorities for COPOLCO. These recommendations can be used by national standards bodies and other organizations when they are considering their priorities for participation in the development of international standards. While the priority setting and decision-making at COPOLCO does not determine resource allocation at the national or regional level, the information provided by the WG can assist consumer representatives to convince their policy makers to support standards work in priority areas and facilitate the participation of consumers.

## **Criteria and Process for Priority Setting:**

To achieve its mandate, the WG has established a process and criteria for priority setting.

The process and criteria that are used by the Working Group is based on the following guidelines:

- Ensuring that each area is evaluated according to a set of criteria and that a rationale is documented for each priority area, and
- Utilizing mechanisms that are straightforward and effective.

There are inherent limitations in the adoption of any process to identify and prioritise issues. Such a process can become inflexible and onerous if used too rigidly and routinely in situations or with issues that are continuously evolving. Priority-setting processes cannot replace evidence, analysis or common sense, judgement or leadership. In addition, it should be recognized that COPOLCO has limited resources for consultation, outreach, and policy research and analysis. Therefore the process established by the WG is designed to be both efficient and effective and the criteria are based on reasonable and well-established benchmarks for consumer issues.

## **Criteria for Setting Priorities**

In order to decide whether an area of work should be considered a priority by COPOLCO, there is a need to determine whether the area is of sufficient interest to consumers and to international standardization. There are many subjects of consumer interest that will not be acceptable as COPOLCO priorities, because the interest for international standardization is low. This may be because the subject is dealt with by legislation, or because regional or national differences are currently too wide for there to be any realistic prospect of reaching agreement at the international level.

This section provides information that should be used when considering areas of work for priority status. The aim is to focus on consumer issues to provide:

- Justification for the priority status given to the subject area;
- Identification of key consumer issues that standards within a priority area need to cover;
- A simple means of measuring progress in the development of standards in terms of the degree to which consumer interests are being met.

A secondary aim is to simplify and focus reporting on progress in meeting consumer requirements.

The following list of criteria provides a reasonable starting point to assess issues that have been identified for consideration by the Working Group:

- Are there consumer issues/interests in the area of work? (See next section)
- Are these issues/interests important in terms of numbers of consumers or the degree of seriousness/level of risk involved?
- Do these consumer issues/interests require action at international level?
- Would international standards help to address gaps in consumer protection between developed and developing/transitional economies?
- Is the development of international standards the appropriate way to deal with these issues/interests?
- Would resources be better allocated elsewhere?

## Identifying Consumer Interests and Issues

### Safety

What are the hazards and levels of risk? Are they sufficiently serious to warrant inclusion in a Standard? (ISO/IEC Guide 51 provides guidelines for the inclusion of safety aspects in standards).

### Performance

Are there consumer issues/interests related to performance that need to be included in a standard? Consideration should be given to:

- Fitness for purpose
- Efficiency
- Durability
- Maintainability
- Ease of use
- Packaging (ISO Guide 41 provides guidelines for the inclusion of consumer requirements in standards for packaging.)

### Likely Users and Usage

Are there consumer issues/interests for all likely users and for people that may come into contact with the product or service that need to be included in a Standard? Consideration should be given to all foreseeable uses including misuse and the following groups of people:

- Young children (ISO/IEC Guide 50 provides general guidelines on the inclusion of child safety in standards)
- Older persons and persons with disabilities (ISO/IEC Guide 71 provides guidance for standards developers to assist in addressing the needs of these consumers)

### Information

Consideration should be given to the following:

- Are there needs for product marking and/or point-of-sale or pre-purchase information, including fitness for purpose, other products or services needed or hazard warnings? (ISO/IEC Guide 14 provides guidance on the inclusion of product information for consumers in standards.)
- Is user information, including instructions for assembly, use, maintenance and disposal required? (ISO/IEC Guide 37 provides guidance on the inclusion of instructions for use in Standards.)
- Description of service(s) (ISO/IEC Guide 76 provides recommendations for addressing consumer issues in service standards).

### Choice

Are there requirements in (draft) Standards that will make the product or service unreasonably expensive for any or all of the likely users? Are requirements design-restrictive?

### Environment

What are the environmental issues? Consideration should be given to the following:

- Materials and processes of manufacture
- Can the materials be recycled?
- Use of products - impact on the environment and its resources, pollution (air, water, noise, waste materials); energy efficiency
- Disposal

### **Developed/Developing Countries**

Are there consumer issues/interests that are important for developing countries that may differ from or add to issues/interests of developed countries? The priority interests of developing countries in particular standards may well differ from developed countries and may require the introduction of additional aspects to address issues such as climate and culture.

### **Realistic Requirements and Test Methods**

Where (draft) Standards already exist, are the requirements relevant to the product or service under consideration? Is the minimum number of requirements specified to achieve the objective and are the requirements set at appropriate, practical levels? Are there, or will there be, validated test methods to determine conformity to each requirement?

## ***Process for Proposals***

### **Step 1 – Submissions**

A proposal to set or amend priorities may be made to the Working Group on Priorities by any COPOLCO member or Consumers International; or by members of the Working Group on Priorities. Reasons are to be given as to why the subject should be made a priority or why amendment of a priority is necessary, with supporting evidence. To assist submitters, a template has been created for Submissions (See Annex 1)

### **Step 2 – Initial Scanning**

The Working Group on Priorities will consider the proposal, either by correspondence or at a meeting, and will take a decision in principle on whether to investigate further. The proposer will be informed of the decision and reasons will be given if the proposal is rejected.

### **Step 3 – Evaluation**

Once proposals have been agreed in principle, further consideration will be given by the Working Group on Priorities using objective criteria, as far as is possible. Data provided by the proposer will be assessed along with any further information obtained by the Working Group. An assessment will be carried out taking into consideration safety, environment, and economics (consumer value) issues.

Throughout the evaluation, care will be taken to relate the proposal under consideration to the need for international standardization. Some subjects might, in COPOLCO's view, be better covered by national or regional standards or by legislation and would, therefore, be given lower priority for COPOLCO, despite the degree of general international interest.

Horizontal issues, (i.e. those subjects of broad consumer interest which cut across the work of more than one technical committee and possibly more than one industry sector) will be considered. If appropriate, they will be referred to the COPOLCO Annual Meeting as possible subjects for ISO/IEC Guides.

The resource implications and the availability of a Key Person willing to take the lead on a proposal will also form part of the evaluation. Normally, a proposal will not receive priority status if the position of Key Person cannot be filled.

**Step 4 – Recommendations to COPOLCO**

Based on the evaluation, the Working Group on Priorities will recommend to COPOLCO the adoption of suitable proposals as priority areas.

***Progress Monitoring***

Once the priority areas are approved by COPOLCO, the Working Group monitors the progress of the approved priority areas through the reporting of the key persons (for more detail see the section on roles and responsibilities). The Working Group reports semi-annually to the Chair's group and consolidates the reports from the Key Persons for the Annual Report to the full membership of COPOLCO.

***Membership***

The WG is led by a Chair, and in those circumstances where there is a twinning arrangement with a member from a Developing Country; WG shall have Co-Chairs to provide the leadership. Membership will be drawn from interested members of COPOLCO, including representatives of member bodies and representatives of liaison organizations such as Consumers International. ISO/COPOLCO members from Developing Countries shall be particularly encouraged to participate as members and to contribute to the work of the group, to ensure that there is input from all geographic regions and interest groups. The WG is supported in their work by the ISO/COPOLCO Secretariat.

***Method of Working***

Meetings of the WG shall be timed and located so as to maximize the involvement by members' representatives. For example, the WG will meet in conjunction with the meeting of the ISO/COPOLCO's Chair's Group. In addition, an additional meeting may be arranged to coincide with the Annual Meeting and Workshop of COPOLCO. In addition to these meetings, communication shall take place electronically to ensure regular communication between members.

***Deliverables***

The WG reports annually to COPOLCO and presents an interim report verbally to the Chairs Group. Based on the Priorities Programme, which COPOLCO approves annually, the Priorities Group coordinates and reports on consumer participation in technical work.

COPOLCO monitors and, through its Priorities Group, coordinates the involvement of consumers in international standards development, ensuring that the best use is made of existing resources. The Priorities Group also promotes networking between consumer representatives in different countries so that they are fully informed. In addition, the WG via its key persons seeks to ensure that relevant ISO TCs and SCs are aware that they are working in priority areas of interest to consumers and COPOLCO.

The Working Group produces an Annual Report outlining the status of Technical Committee work in priority areas, which provides information about key persons, and areas of technical activity as well as an overview of representation activity. To raise awareness about COPOLCO's priority areas, the Working Group also produces a brief communiqué from time to time as new developments occur.

## **Roles and Responsibilities:**

With the limited resources available, it is important that operations are streamlined and that deliverables of the WG are concise and user-friendly. The success of the WG depends on the coordination and cooperation of the various participants involved in the process, including: Working Group, Secretariat, Key Persons and Consumer Representatives. This section outlines the role and responsibilities of each of these groups.

### ***Working Group***

The responsibilities of the **Working Group** and its members include:

- Reporting annually to COPOLCO on priority areas of consumer interest
- Recommending to COPOLCO the establishment of processes and criteria for setting and monitoring priorities in the consumer interest Identifying new priority areas
- Evaluating progress of existing areas of priority
- Fostering consumer participation and communication between consumer representatives
- Identifying consumer priorities in both the developed and developing countries
- Contributing to the effective and efficient operation of the Working Group

### ***Secretariat***

The responsibilities of the **Secretariat** include:

- Coordinating the preparation of documents to the COPOLCO Plenary meeting (usually in May), including, a list of priority areas identifying Key Persons, participants and consumer issues, and a collated report containing individual progress reports, including completion of work items submitted by Key Persons, and recommendations for any future activities.
- Providing administrative support to the Working Group, including: arranging meetings, preparing agendas, recording minutes, and sharing information and documents
- Working with the Chair to ensure effective and efficient operation of the Working Group

### ***Key Persons***

Key Persons are appointed by the Working Group on Priorities to act as the focal point in agreed priority areas. Their primary responsibilities are to:

- Exchange information with other consumer representatives interested in the subject area
- Report annually to COPOLCO on matters of consumer interest, activities and progress relevant to international standardization in their priority area.
- Monitor progress within their area of responsibility and to report to the Working Group on Priorities. No rigid procedure is specified, although Key Persons will be expected to report against the criteria and should identify any new consumer issues that have arisen during the report period.

Progress is to be monitored by the Key Person responsible for the priority area as follows:

- Progress of the work within the technical committee(s) through the ISO or IEC project stages
- Progress in meeting consumer concerns that have been identified at the outset and as the work develops Work progress monitoring will indicate how the committee work is developing, whilst the focus on consumer issues will provide evidence of the success or otherwise in developing international standards which meet consumer needs and evidence of when the priority area may be

removed from the COPOLCO Priorities Programme. Reporting to the Working Group on Priorities will normally be carried out annually in January/February, although the Working Group may request a report at any time. A report form will be supplied by the Working Group on Priorities to assist in uniform presentation of reports from all Key Persons.

Key Persons are encouraged to:

- Be directly/closely involved at a national or international level in the relevant standards work of the priority area
- Establish, and act as, the focal point for an information network between the consumer representatives
- Co-ordinate and promote consumer activities in the area
- Raise, where appropriate, any major issue that may require COPOLCO's direct input, with the Working Group on Priorities
- Report changes in the scope of ISO/IEC committees, which would affect the priority programme.

*Note: It is recognized that Key Persons are volunteers and may have limited resources. Where appropriate, for example where the work is split into more than one specialist subject or where the workload is high, the Key Person may share their responsibilities with other participants*

## Developing Countries

The interests of developing countries are very important for the development of international standards. Developing countries account for over 70% of the membership of ISO, and their participation in ISO technical work is growing. Even so, developing country NSBs adopt relatively few international standards and even fewer implement the standards effectively. This leads to economic divides and barriers to international trade. The interests of consumers in developing countries are of equal importance in the development of relevant international standards. Hence, the Working Group on Priorities welcomes and encourages the involvement of representatives from developing countries in its work and takes into consideration developing countries' interests when recommending priorities. Developing-country participation in the Working Group has been encouraged in recent years for both leadership roles and membership in the Committee.

To strengthen this participation, the Working Group on Priorities recommends that developing countries initiate a positive dialogue with national consumer organizations to receive their inputs.

Key persons, with the support of the Working Group on Priorities, should encourage developing-country participation in priority areas when opportunities arise. They should also bear in mind the priority interests of these countries in particular standards, which may well differ from developed countries. It may be necessary to introduce additional aspects to address issues such as climate or culture. Where consumer representatives from developing countries declare an interest in a priority area, the key person should take every effort to promote communication and as a minimum, inform the representative about drafts for comment. This will assist developing-country representatives to comment on draft standards and to present their views to other participants within the priority area. It should be noted that electronic communication is rapidly increasing the opportunities for such information exchange.

## **Other Participants / Consumers International**

Other participants are key to the success of the Priority Programme and include consumer representatives from national standards bodies or other consumer organizations that are involved at national or international levels in a COPOLCO priority area.

**Consumers International** places observers on ISO/IEC technical committees, although its ability to do so is limited as no direct funds are available for them to support this activity. ISO COPOLCO has no direct access to ISO technical committees and therefore normally uses its influence to encourage consumer participation on these committees through national standards bodies. However, **Consumers International** participates in the COPOLCO Working Group on Priorities and liaises over priority issues. Key Persons are, therefore, encouraged to keep Consumers International informed of their activities, particularly at critical stages in standards development when wide consumer support would be valuable. In addition, Key Persons should be aware that Consumers International would consider placing representatives on technical committees in priority areas, assuming funding could be obtained.

## **Relevant Publications**

### ***Policy statements***

ISO/IEC statement, *Consumer participation in standardization work*

ISO/IEC statement, *Addressing the needs of older persons and people with disabilities in standardization work*

### ***Guides***

ISO/IEC Guide 14, *Purchase information on goods and services intended for consumers.*

ISO/IEC Guide 37, *Instructions for use of products of consumer interest* (under revision).

ISO Guide 41, *Packaging - Recommendations for addressing consumer needs.*

ISO/IEC Guide 46, *Comparative testing of consumer products and related services - General principles* (under revision).

ISO/IEC Guide 74, *Graphical symbols – Technical guidelines for the consideration of consumers' needs*

ISO/IEC Guide 76, *Standardization of services – Recommendations for addressing consumer issues*

### ***Contributions to other guides***

ISO/IEC Guide 50, *Child safety and standards - General guidelines.*

ISO/IEC Guide 51, *Guidelines for the inclusion of safety aspects in standards.*

ISO/IEC Guide 71, *Guidelines for standards developers to address the needs of older persons and persons with disabilities.*

## ***Informative Publications and Resources***

[\*Your voice matters – Why consumers need to participate in standards making ...and how to get involved : 2003\*](#)

[\*The consumer and standards – Guidance and principles for consumer participation in standards development: 2003\*](#)

[\*ISO and the consumer\*](#)

[\*ISO Directory of consumer interest participation\*](#)

[\*Consumers and standards: partnership for a better world\*](#)

[\*The international language of graphical symbols\*](#)

## Annex 1 – Template for Priority Area Submissions

Submission prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1 Description/Nature of the Problem:

- *What is the need and what evidence exists?*
- *How serious is the problem and what is the level of risk?*
- *Is this issue a horizontal issue or is it product specific?*

### 2 How Problem Came to Your Attention:

### 3 Can International Standards Address the Problem?

- *Does this issue require action at the international level?*
- *What is the value to society of an international standard – what are the benefits?*
- *Who would be affected by international standards in this area?*
- *Are international standards or other ISO/IEC deliverables the appropriate solution?*
- *Are you aware of relevant national regulations related to this area?*
- *Is the area being covered by a regional standard (such as an EN standard)?*

**Note: if the answer to 3 is "no", please go to question 8**

### 4 Can the problem be addressed in an existing Technical Committee or other structure?

**If yes:**

- *Is standards work in this area already occurring within an existing Technical Committee(s)?*
- *Should there be consumer participation on that committee to raise issues related to this problem?*
- *Is there an international Technical Committee(s) that potentially could address the issue but has not done so?*
- *What are the reasons why this Technical Committee (s) should address the problem?*
- *What Technical Committee(s) or other structures should be identified as potentially, or actually, working on the problem?*
- *Should this be a new priority area for COPOLCO (see question 8)?*

**If no:**

- *Is this a completely new area of technical work for ISO?*
- *Should ISO/COPOLCO consider developing a proposal for a new work item proposal for ISO (see question 8)?*
- *Is there another standardizing organization which is addressing this issue? Which one?*

**5 Estimate of Time and Resources Required:**

*How urgent is the need?*

*What support exists for this area of work? What experts/organizations could contribute?*

*What would be the impact of resources allocated to this area?*

*What kind of resources (time, talent, research, funds, and expertise) are needed?*

**6 Potential Key Person:**

**7 What are the consumer interests?**

*Please identify the consumer interests, such as: safety and health, performance, fitness for purpose, likely users and usage (e.g., needs of children, older persons and persons with disabilities), information, choice, protection of the environment, needs of developing countries.*

**8 Next steps**

*What do you propose as the next steps for COPOLCO?*

- *Monitor the problem by adding it to the list of Priorities*
- *Conduct a feasibility/justification study*
- *Propose a new area of work for ISO*
- *A specific recommendation for ISO to address the problem*
- *Other \_\_\_\_\_*

**Recommendation by Priorities WG**

Date submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of initial review: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of recommendation: \_\_\_\_\_