

## **ISO/IEC STATEMENT ON *CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDIZATION WORK***

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### **Foreword**

While the international trade of products and services has been expanding rapidly, international and national standards regarding products and services for consumers have also become more important for consumer interests than ever before.

Standards bodies were traditionally based on industrial representatives, who viewed the work from a supplier's perspective. The needs of consumers tended to be given second priority in this set-up, but consumers nevertheless appreciated the benefits to be gained from standardization.

Standards, either international or domestic, should be developed based on a consensus among all interested parties, including manufacturers, users and consumers, as outlined in ISO/IEC Guide 59 *Code of good practice for standardization*.

Consumers are one of the most important stakeholders of standards, especially as regards goods and services for consumers. It is essential that consumer representatives participate in the standards development process for these products and services.

Consumer participation is also beneficial for manufacturers, because goods and services that adopt standards developed with consumer participation may be more easily accepted in the marketplace.

However, consumer representatives face difficulties participating in the standards development process, due to a lack of financial resources and technological expertise. It is therefore necessary for international and national standards organizations to encourage and support consumer participation in standardization work.

The aim of these recommendations is to help promote greater consumer participation in the standardization process.

Here the term "consumer" is understood to mean an individual member of the general public, purchasing or using goods, property or services, for private purposes.

## **CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN STANDARDIZATION WORK**

### **Introduction**

ISO and IEC recognize as a basic principle of standards activities that the interests of governments, manufacturers, all categories of users and consumers, and any others concerned, should be taken into account. This implies that, for standardization work at the international level, delegations to technical committee meetings should be in a position to

represent all interests within their respective countries. Therefore, consumers should be represented to a degree which reflects their importance as customers using a particular material, service or product.

The importance of international standards must be recognized and taken into consideration following the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). A number of initiatives have been taken at the regional and national level, which place emphasis on using standards based on consensus (e.g. the adoption of the National Technology Transfer and Advancement Act in the United States, the New Approach in Europe). These agreements and initiatives also acknowledge that any effective consensus must be widely based, to ensure that all parties to the use of a product or service have an equal voice in determining the standards applicable to it. Therefore, consensus procedures require the access of consumer representatives to all levels and stages of the standardization process.

To promote consumer representation in the work of national standards bodies, ISO and IEC adopted recommendations on consumer representation in standardization in 1979.

Although there is a tradition of consumer representation in standardization in some countries stretching back many years, some national members initially faced difficulties when trying to implement these recommendations. National members reported problems identifying representative consumer opinion and setting up the best organizational structure to take account of it effectively in their work.

Considerable progress has been made in setting up national consumer organizations since the recommendations were first made. Some national standards bodies have established a formal consumer committee whose membership is drawn from the general public, academic institutes and other organizations with an interest in consumer issues.

Consumer representatives have made a considerable contribution to the work of the international standards bodies over the past few years. Standardization for the environment and for services are but two examples of international standardization work initiated as a result of consumer pressure. Consumer representatives can also bring to the technical work many years of experience in the comparative testing of products. At the policy level, consumer representatives can help to ensure the market relevance of standards work programmes.

For their part, ISO and IEC undertake to promote the addressing of consumer issues in their work.

## Recommendations

ISO and IEC make the following recommendations jointly to the national bodies (member bodies and National Committees) of both organizations:

1. National bodies shall support ISO and IEC initiatives aimed at encouraging consumer representation in standardization.
2. There should be provision at the national level for consumer participation in the initiation and planning of the standards work programmes, both national and international, as well as in policy matters relevant to the consumer.
3. At the national level, consumer interests should be invited to participate in all technical committees executing standards projects affecting the interests of the consumer. The degree of participation should reflect the relative importance to consumer interests of the particular project.
4. If consumers are not able to finance their participation in the standardization process themselves, the national body should enable consumers to participate in priority areas of consumer interest. It should be recalled that consumers form an integral part of the consensus-building process.
5. Where a technical committee is developing an International Standard primarily of interest to consumers, national bodies should seek the active participation of consumers in national delegations.

It is essential that the consumer representatives are involved when the delegation is briefed and that the consumer view is taken into account when decisions on the national position are taken.

6. To assist national bodies in this effort, technical committees should include a statement in their new work item requests to highlight the fact that a specific international standardization matter is of particular interest to consumers (as required by the *ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1, Annex C*).
7. Standards work can be technical and complex by nature. Where possible and necessary, national bodies should provide consumer representatives with guidance and training on standards procedures and with briefings on technical issues, in order to make their contribution both effective and based on a knowledge of real possibilities. Consumer representatives should receive early notice concerning upcoming meetings and should receive documents in sufficient time to review them thoroughly. There should also be access for persons with disabilities, for anyone who requires it.
8. National bodies should ensure effective communication to consumer groups, other relevant organizations and the general public, on the results of their standards work of interest to consumers. Whenever possible, they should use publicity expertise and new possibilities offered by technological development (such as the Internet), to encourage feedback and the application of standards.

9. National bodies should be encouraged to "sound out" consumer opinion through existing consumer organizations or, if no such organizations exist, on their own initiative.
10. During the standards-writing process, consumer input should be sought in particular at the following stages:
  - during the establishment of standardization work programmes;
  - as soon as a subject is proposed to the standards body for study, at the time the feasibility of the project is being established and prior to the establishment of the draft proposal;
  - when establishing the scope of the standard (e.g. health and safety, fitness for use and environment), listing the characteristics, assigning the tasks to the members of the committee and determining whether research among consumers is necessary;
  - during the technical committee's work, whenever a decision is to be made that affects the established scope and/or the required performance level(s);
  - whenever national delegations are briefed for their participation in international standards work, encouraging representation of consumer interests on national delegations;
  - following the circulation of the draft, when the committee considers all the comments received;
  - at the voting stage.

(A list of key moments for consumer input in standards development is given at Annex.)

To target consumer input, the setting of priority areas of work is very important.

There should be a process for identifying priority areas of work where consumer participation is deemed essential, as well as areas where consumer involvement is considered less critical, i.e. when keeping consumers informed may be sufficient. Technical committees and standards bodies should work with consumers to try to identify priority issues for consumer participation, for example on the basis of the priority areas identified by COPOLCO.

Standards bodies should also seek to identify, for the priority areas, consumer representatives. They should organize an effective system of communication between these representatives and the officer in charge of that work at the national standards body.

11. National bodies are invited to study the composition and terms of reference of the various consumer committees of other national bodies, and to consider whether any changes in their own national structures would be appropriate in order to follow these recommendations.
12. National bodies should provide a mechanism to allow consumer representatives to request that standards projects be initiated and to ensure that these initiatives have normal opportunities to progress.

13. Particular attention should be paid to providing a close coordination of all activities arising from these recommendations within the same country. This would also facilitate a common approach to matters of consumer interest in international standardization.

## Key moments for consumer input in standards development

Stage in process	Consumer input
New work item	Consumer representatives should be involved in identifying new work items for the standards bodies, and should be informed of the commencement of work on new work items to allow them to identify priorities for direct consumer participation.
Consensus-building within working group	Consumer representatives may wish to participate directly on priority issues.
Consensus-building within SC/TC	Consumer representatives should be consulted as part of the national consensus-building process on matters of consumer interest.
Enquiry draft voting (DIS in ISO, CDV in IEC)	(as above)
Approval vote (FDIS in ISO/IEC)	(as above)
Publication of new standard	Where possible, consumer representatives should help to ensure that standards are actually used.
Periodic review/revision	Consumer representatives should provide feedback from the practical application of the standard.