

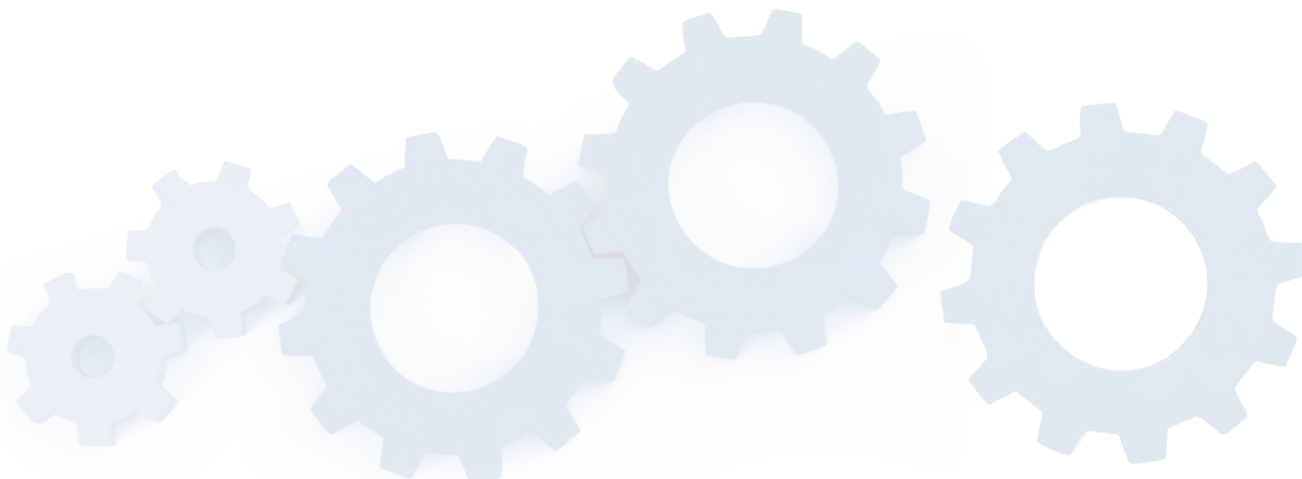
A practical guide for SMEs

Why standards matter and how to get involved



What is a standard?

A standard is an agreed way of doing something.



What is a standard?

It is a document providing requirements, specifications, guidelines or characteristics that can be used to ensure that materials, products, processes and services are fit for purpose. Standards help to ensure that products and services are safe, reliable and of good quality.

They cover a wide range of subjects, from construction to artificial intelligence, and from globes to agricultural machinery. They can apply to very specific products, or they can be general like quality or environmental management system standards. Standards are established by consensus and drafted for voluntary use. In some cases, standards can become mandatory, but this is only when regulators decide to adopt them as legal requirements or when they become part of a contractual agreement between parties.



Harmonised standards

A harmonised standard is a European standard developed and adopted by one or more European standards organisations following a standardisation request from the European Commission in support of European legislation. The references to harmonised standards are published in the Official Journal of the EU. In each harmonised standard, an annex explains the relationship between its requirements and the requirements of EU legislation. Compliance with harmonised standards provides presumed conformity with the essential requirements of the corresponding European legislation (regulation or directive). Manufacturers are always free to choose another form of proof that they meet the requirements, but the use of harmonised standards helps SMEs to satisfy the requirements of EU legislation.

Why should SMEs care about standards?

Standardisation offers considerable benefits to SMEs.



Improved competitiveness and access to markets

Compared to larger companies, SMEs have less financial and other resources available to show the conformity and performance of their products and gain the trust of the market. Standards can help SMEs to compete on a level playing field with bigger companies, by objectively and simply demonstrating the quality, safety and performance of their products and services. Standards can also help to demonstrate compliance with legal requirements (see the section on harmonised standards) and technical requirements, enabling SMEs to gain customer trust, reduce trade barriers and access new markets.

enable SMEs to be more efficient by improving performance, quality and reliability, and by reducing waste.



Support for innovation

Standardisation can help to bring innovative solutions to the market by defining interfaces, establishing compatibility requirements and creating trust in new technologies. Innovative companies use standardisation as a strategic tool for increasing the market acceptance of their products.



Reduced costs and increased efficiency

Standards simplify component specifications, allow economies of scale and facilitate maintenance. They also help to ensure uniformity so that final products and services are consistent. They can even

Who's who in standardisation?

Standards are adopted by independent, officially recognised bodies at the national, European and international levels. Standardisation activities at these three levels are complementary.



European standardisation

CEN, CENELEC and ETSI are the three European standardisation organisations officially recognised by the European Union and by the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) as being responsible for developing and defining voluntary standards at the European level.

A European Standard (EN) is implemented at national level by being given the status of a national standard and by the withdrawal of any conflicting national standard. European Standards are

therefore a key foundation of the European Single Market because they ensure easier access to the markets of all European countries based on the same standard.



CEN (www.cencenelec.eu), the European Committee for Standardization, supports standardisation activities in relation to a wide range of fields and sectors, including air and space, chemicals, construction, consumer products, defence and security, energy, the environment, food and feed, health and safety, healthcare, ICT, machinery,

materials, pressure equipment, services, smart living, transport and packaging.



CENELEC (www.cencenelec.eu), the European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation, is responsible for standardisation in the electrotechnical field.



ETSI (www.etsi.org), the European Telecommunications Standards Institute, produces standards for information and communications technologies (ICT), including fixed, mobile, radio, converged, broadcast and internet technologies.



International standardisation

International standards are developed considering the global perspective, by the international standardisation organisations (ISO, IEC and ITU). The European standardisation organisations have cooperation agreements with their international counterparts, to avoid duplication of work and to harmonise European and international standards as far as possible. For example, these agreements allow CEN and CENELEC to jointly develop shared European and international standards with ISO and IEC respectively. There is no obligation to adopt international standards as national standards unless they are also adopted as European standards.



National standardisation

The development of national standards is the responsibility of national standards bodies (NSBs).

The latest list of recognised NSBs by country was published in the Official Journal of the EU in March 2020



ISO (www.iso.org), the International Organization for Standardization, is the international multisectoral standardisation organisation equivalent to CEN. It is active in all fields except the electrotechnical and telecommunication fields.



IEC (www.iec.ch), the International Electrotechnical Commission, is the counterpart of CENELEC at international level. It is active in the electrotechnical domain.



ITU (www.itu.int), the International Telecommunication Union, is the United Nations' specialised agency for information and communication technologies.

How are standards developed?



CEN, CENELEC, ISO and IEC are organisations made up of national standards bodies. The development of standards in these organisations is based on the national delegation principle. Standards are developed in technical committees, to which each NSB sends a delegation of experts to represent their national standpoint. This standpoint is discussed and defined in “national mirror committees” gathering all interested parties (businesses, consumers, public authorities, NGOs, etc.) at national level. This gives stakeholders the opportunity to deliberate and work together in their national language, which is an advantage for SMEs.

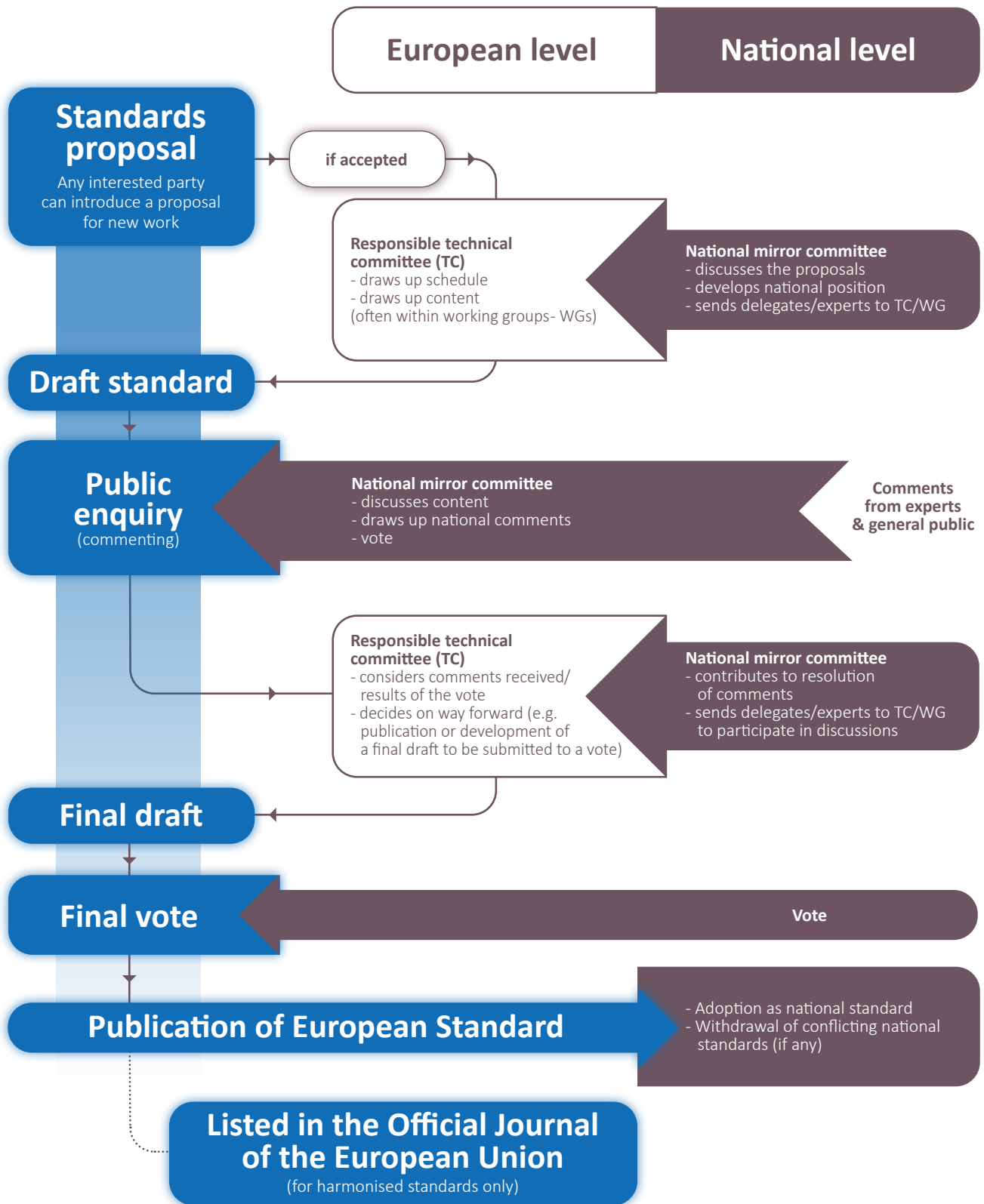
ETSI does not operate based on the national delegation principle. Instead, it uses the principle of direct industry participation (without NSBs or other intermediaries). The work done by ETSI is carried out in committees and working groups composed of technical experts from the institute’s member companies and organisations.

In addition to European Standards (ENs), standards bodies also develop other kinds of documents, such as technical specifications or technical reports. In these cases, a public enquiry does not always take place and the approval procedure may be different.



Adoption at national level and the withdrawal of any existing conflicting national standards are mandatory for European Standards (ENs) only.

The development of a European Standard (EN), step by step



How to get involved

Standards are driven by business and drafted by experts coming from industry, trade federations, public authorities, academia and NGOs.



Participating in standardisation provides opportunities to represent your interests and influence the process, to gain knowledge and to exchange information with other stakeholders.

There are several ways to take part in the standardisation process:

◇ **Contact your national standards body** to participate in national committees and contribute to the development of national, European (CEN, CENELEC) and international (ISO, IEC) standards. Often, participation in the mirror committee will require the payment of a fee. In some countries there are special rates for SMEs to support their participation in standardisation. To get involved in the drafting of ETSI standards, SMEs need to become members.

◇ **For European and international standards, there is a “public enquiry period” lasting 12 weeks.** During this period, the NSBs launch a consultation at national level to gather input from stakeholders. Many NSBs have a free online portal where stakeholders can view the drafts under consultation and submit comments, even if they are not members of the relevant national committee.

◇ **Participate in consultations through your national or European association.** In many cases, companies agree to send an expert from an association to represent their common interests in national, European or international technical committees. Membership of an association is not always necessary to participate in these consultations.

◇ **Small Business Standards (SBS) can provide financial and technical support** to SMEs wishing to get involved in the standards development process. SBS publishes an open call every year, to select experts to represent the interests of SMEs in European and international standardisation work. You may also participate in the activities of SBS through its [member associations](#).

The role of Small Business Standards (SBS)

Although SMEs play a major role in Europe's economy, they often hesitate and face difficulties when it comes to participating and getting involved in the standardisation process.



Moreover, very often SMEs are not even aware of how important standards are for their trade and daily activities. The main problems are a lack of information on standards, insufficient resources, little knowledge of applicable standards and a need to better understand the standardisation process. It is important that SMEs participate in discussing, writing and updating standards, otherwise their needs may not be taken into account and the final standard may even impose unnecessary or inappropriate requirements on them.

The main goals of SBS are to represent and defend SMEs' interests in the standardisation process at the European and international levels, to raise awareness about standardisation and to motivate SMEs to get involved. To achieve these objectives, SBS organises training, national seminars and events, and disseminates information on standardisation through various channels. One of its main activities is the appointment of SME experts to relevant standards committees and working groups at the European and international levels.

SBS was established in response to EU Regulation 1025/2012 on the European standardisation system, which aims to make the standardisation system as inclusive, transparent and open as possible. Its activities are funded to a large extent by the European Commission and EFTA.

Further information on the activities of SBS can be found on its [website](#).



Where to find out more



Existing **technical committees** and **standards**

Information on the European technical committees, published standards and those under development:

- ◇ **CEN and CENELEC:** <https://standards.cencenelec.eu/dyn/www/f?p=CEN:105::RESET:::>
- ◇ **ETSI:** <https://www.etsi.org/committees>

Information on international technical committees and standards:

- ◇ **ISO:** <https://www.iso.org/technical-committees.html>
- ◇ **IEC:** <https://www.iec.ch/technical-committees-and-subcommittees#tclist>

Most of these organisations also offer search engines where you can search for a specific standard by keyword, reference, title and/or activity sector:

- ◇ **CEN and CENELEC:** <https://standards.cencenelec.eu/dyn/www/f?p=CEN:105::RESET:::>
- ◇ **ETSI:** <https://www.etsi.org/standards#Pre-defined%20Collections>
- ◇ **ISO:** <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- ◇ **IEC:** <https://advsearch.iec.ch/ords//f?p=117:105:0>

Each national standards body also normally includes a list of existing national standards committees and an electronic search engine on its website. Often, information about the standard (e.g. abstract, scope, index) is also available. All European and international standards can also be found at the national level. European standards are simply preceded by the letters “EN”.



Finding the text of a standard

ETSI standards are available free of charge on the institute's website

European standards developed by CEN and CENELEC are only sold by their members, the national standards bodies. CEN and CENELEC do not sell standards directly. The prices of the standards vary according to the member from which they are purchased.

International standards can be obtained through the national standards bodies, but it is also possible to purchase them directly via the ISO (<https://www.iso.org/store.html>) and IEC (<https://webstore.iec.ch/>) stores.

Note that standards are protected by copyrights and it is forbidden to copy them for further distribution or commercial use.



SME helpdesks

◇ **CEN-CENELEC SME Helpdesk**

This is the one-stop service point for European SMEs that wish to understand more about and contribute to European standardisation.

<https://www.cencenelec.eu/get-involved/small-and-medium-enterprises-smes/smes-and-standards/>

◇ **SME section on ETSI website**

This section provides information on SME member benefits and a dedicated contact point.

<https://www.etsi.org/membership/sme>

◇ **National SME helpdesks**

CEN and CENELEC have established a network of national SME helpdesks that provide direct support to SMEs via e-mail or phone in their national language.

<https://www.cencenelec.eu/get-involved/small-and-medium-enterprises-smes/smes-and-standards/local-support-for-smes/>

Most national standards bodies also provide national SME toolboxes or webpages dedicated to SMEs. Consult the website of your NSB and find out what support it offers to SMEs.



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