

ETUC Standardisation Newsletter - April 2024

Dear colleagues and friends,

The ETUC is pleased to share with you its newsletter on standardisation, bringing you regular updates on the ETUC's activities in this field. We are pleased to deliver information on European and international standardisation straight to your inbox. If you wish to receive additional information and/or documents related to the news presented below, feel free to contact us at standards@etuc.org.

Belgian Trade Unions Write to the Belgian Minister of Economic Affairs



“The standardisation system is open and inclusive”. This statement is made on many occasions by national standardisation bodies that are members of the

European (CEN and CENELEC) and international (ISO and IEC) standardisation bodies.

Yet, to date - and in several countries, including Belgium - national standardisation bodies are open and inclusive only upon payment of an annual membership fee. This poses true challenges to the participation of many organisations whose contributions would benefit the quality, credibility and multi-stakeholder support of standardisation activities, but who are not able to engage due to resource limitation and high entry fees.

To this end, the leadership of various Belgian environmental, social and consumer stakeholder organisations have written a joint letter to the Belgian Minister of Economic affairs, requesting that the Belgian national standardisation body – NBN – aligns with existing national and European policy principles around the inclusiveness of standard-setting activities, by lifting the barrier to entry.

Resolution on Standardisation Adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee



On 26-27 March 2024, the ETUC Executive Committee adopted a [resolution on standardisation](#). The resolution reflects on the role of standardisation and its relevance for trade unions, as well as on plans for work in the field.

As noted in the European Commission’s “EU Standardisation Strategy” (2022), “more than ever standards do not only have to deal with technical components, but also incorporate core EU democratic values and interests, as well as green and social principles”.

Traditionally written for industry and by industry, technical standards increasingly address workers’ issues. Examples include the coverage of social responsibility, management systems, services, artificial intelligence & digitalisation, etc. The expansion of the scope of such standards underscores the importance of trade union engagement in both European and international standardisation activities.

As outlined in its Action Programme (2023-2027), the ETUC opposes standardisation initiatives that interfere with workers and trade union matters and which are better addressed in collective agreements and legislation. At the same time, where work does take place despite trade union opposition, the ETUC’s recognises the importance of engaging in standardisation activities that impact the life of workers, to ensure standards support the promotion of high-quality working conditions, and that the role of trade unions in social dialogues and collective bargaining is respected.

For more about the ETUC Standardisation Project, [click here](#).

Problematic Proposal Launched for an ISO Standard on AI in Human Resource Management



ISO Technical Committee 260 on Human Resource Management is currently looking at preparing an international standard on 'Guidance for risk management and the ethical use and adoption of technology'. The standard aims to propose measures to mitigate the human capital risks and provide guidance for the use and adoption of technology for HR processes, practices and job roles. It would also address technological change impacting the worker, e.g. surveillance, sensors, automation and their consequent impact related to distress or anxiety among workers.

The ETUC is opposing the proposed work as the development of such a standard raises a number of concerns.

In Europe, according to the recently adopted AI Act, the use of AI in employment is considered high risk because of the potential risk it poses to fundamental rights. Indeed, the use of AI in employment raises specific concerns which include, but are not limited to, disproportionate and undue surveillance at work, discriminatory treatment on the basis of biased algorithms, and the risk of abuse of data protection and privacy.

The AI Act, as an internal market regulation following the New Legislative Framework, sets out the essential legal requirements AI systems must comply with in order to be placed on the market. The technical measures substantiating the legal requirements are then provided in standards. The Commission has already mandated the development of standards to support the EU AI Act (European Commission C (2023)3215); the dedicated technical committee, CEN-CENELEC JTC 21 'AI' has started preparing deliverables with requirements inter alia on risk management system, data and data governance, and transparency and information to the users.

The ETUC stresses that initiating a project in ISO/TC 260 addressing similar requirements would not only clearly overlap with the work carried out in Europe, but it would also risk setting a lower level of requirements. Standards developed in ISO/TC 260 are not required to be aligned with the EU AI Act, nor to support EU values and principles. Should this standard on AI be transposed in Europe, it risks falling short in supporting European policy objectives for AI and more specifically in the protection of fundamental rights.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there is already a significant number of standards on AI being developed at international level, specifically in the ISO/IEC JTC 1/

SC 42 'Artificial Intelligence' created in 2018. SC 42 has a broad scope of AI development that includes basic terminology and definitions, risk management, bias and trustworthiness in AI systems, robustness of neural networks, and machine-learning systems.

Finally, while technical standards can help design and develop AI systems that meet critical objectives for functionality and interoperability, they are not sufficient to protect workers' rights from the application of AI systems at the workplace.

Health and Safety Risks at Work Linked to Changing Climate



Climate change is not only affecting nature, but also workers. Those who need to work under extreme weather conditions such as heat, floodings and an increased level of air pollution are exposed to a set of risks. Not only climate change itself, but also related mitigation and adaptation measures such as relocation of work and working with new technologies (solar panels, hydrogen storage) bring new risks to the health and safety of workers.

In this context, the International Organisation for Standardisation, ISO, is going to develop a standard to tackle risks related to occupational health and safety (OHS), arising from climate change and climate action. The new work, [ISO/PAS](#)

[45007](#), will be part of the series of ISO 45001 on occupational Health & Safety management system.

The PAS will address OHS risks resulting from climate change mitigation as well as from adaptation efforts, including changing ways of working and work processes, and infrastructure upgrades.

The PAS will be developed in a short period of time, with a view to have the standard ready as soon as possible. The ISO/PAS 45007 should be finalised by December 2024. The work is taking place in ISO/Technical Committee 283 'Occupational Health & Safety management'.

In 2023, the [European Commission took first steps to protect workers from extreme heat](#) following a campaign by the ETUC. An ETUC survey found that only a few European countries have legislation to keep workers safe during heatwaves. To this end, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work published [guidance on employers' responsibility to people working in high temperatures](#), in Spring 2023.

Advisory Committee on Health & Safety Restarts Work on Standardisation



The Advisory Committee for Safety and Health at Work (ACSH) is a tripartite body that enables cooperation between national authorities, trade unions and employers. The main task of ACSH is to provide input to the European Commission for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of legislative activities in the field of occupational safety and health (OSH), and OSH-related policies.

In 2024, the ACSH has revived its Working Party (WP) on Standardisation. The members of the WP Standardisation will monitor and provide opinion on the alignment of European and international standards and the EU legislation on Occupational Safety and Health.

The ETUC forms part of the Workers Interest Group in WP Standardisation together with representatives from France, Germany and Sweden. In the first meeting in March, the ETUC was assigned the role of the Rapporteur. One of the first tasks of the WP will be to identify priorities for which international standardisation work on OSH risks arising from climate change (ISO 45007, see previous article in this newsletter) seems to be important.

The ETUC welcomes the reactivation of the WP on Standardisation and looks forward to a good collaboration with the employers and national authorities in this work.

AI Standardisation Inclusiveness Newsletter



If you wish to be better informed about AI standardisation and related activities and events, or if you are interested in influencing and participating more in AI standardisation, the CEN-CENELEC Joint Technical Committee 21 on 'Artificial Intelligence' shares updated information on AI standardisation and related activities to all interested stakeholders, via the regular publication of a newsletter. All the AI standardisation Inclusiveness newsletters are available in the ETUC dedicated [webpage](#).

The ETUC provides secretariat work for the newsletter. Any request to be included in the mailing list or suggestions for publication should be addressed to [TG Inclusiveness@etuc.org](mailto:TG_Inclusiveness@etuc.org).

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