

ACCESS GRANTED?

HELPING ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS ENGAGE
IN STANDARDISATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL



Conference report

The conference, which was hosted by ECOS on 5 December 2018, offered an opportunity for all stakeholders to better understand the needs and challenges related to environmental NGOs' engagement in standardisation at national level and discuss solutions to grant them access to the standardisation system in an effective and future-proof manner. The event gathered nearly 70 participants, representing civil society organisations, national authorities and standardisation organisations, CEN-CENELEC, EU Institutions and industry.

The following points were discussed:

- The role which standards can play in raising environmental protection and their use in legislation by policy-makers;
- The need for information about the actual impacts of standards on the environment and society as a whole;
- The importance of civil society organisations' involvement in the standardisation process and the facilitating role which national standardisation organisations and authorities should play in it;
- Good practices to engage ENGOs and other civil society organisations in standardisation at national level and how these could be replicated in all countries.
- The barriers faced by environmental NGOs and other civil society organisations, such as the perceived lack of influence, lack of funding, the difficulty to find expertise, as well as the differences in the conditions of participation in different countries (e.g. in term of access to information and participation fees);
- The differences which exist between environmental NGOs (ENGOs) and other civil society organisations' engagement, such as consumer organisations and trade unions, due to different historical background, cultures or strategies;

Laura Degallaix, ECOS Director, opened the conference highlighting ECOS had represented the environmental NGO community in standardisation for almost 20 years at the European and international level. ECOS has been instrumental in raising the ambition of standards for greater environmental protection and making the standardisation system more transparent and inclusive. However, participation at European level is not sufficient to cope with the increasing use of standards to raise environmental protection and support legislation in this area. In the last five years the membership of ECOS has almost doubled, which shows that there is a growing interest of ENGOs in standardisation across Europe and beyond, partly due to ECOS outreach to a wider environmental NGO community. It is now important that this interest translates into active engagement in standardisation work.

This event identified the barriers to ENGO participation in standardisation at a national level and proposed ways to ensure that they are granted access to standardisation in an effective and sustainable manner.

Keynotes were given by:

Gerhard Leibrock, Team Leader at the European Commission, DG GROW. Mr Leibrock discussed the European standardisation framework, explaining the role and use of standards in supporting legislation, and presented the definition and advantages of the New Approach (NA). Questions from the audience raised the unequal access rights to national standardisation organisations across European countries, and the potential for more structured support from the European Commission to improve these aspects.

Elena Santiago Cid, Director-General of CEN-CENELEC, presented how empowering civil society is essential for better standards. Standards can help make products, and eventually Europe, greener. Therefore, it is essential to engage with all actors in order to realise the Circular Economy ambitions. She stated more than 1.100 standards contain environmental requirements. She then went on to point out CEN-CENELEC's successful cooperation with ECOS, and highlighted ongoing efforts and projects to improve the collaboration with civil society organisations such as the recent CEN [ENgage project](#) or the [eLearning tool on standardisation](#) for civil society, in both of which ECOS played an active role.

Claudia Kuss-Tenzer, Director of UK Sustainability Network for Standardisation (SNS), gave insight on how to move from interest in standardisation to actual involvement. She gave an overview of a number of barriers she had encountered when starting the SNS project and turning it into an established charity. She highlighted her network's success factors: among others, collaboration with partners such as ECOS and national ENGOs, the support received from the British standardisation institution, BSI, and availability of suitable expertise.

The keynotes were followed by a panel with **Laura Degallaix (ECOS), Francisco Ferreira (ZERO), Christophe Hauert (University of Lausanne), Jens Henriksson (Swedish Consumers' Association) and Slavica Robić (DOOR).** The debate allowed various stakeholders to discuss their perspective and understanding of the needs and challenges of ENGOs. The panelists agreed that many of the barriers ENGOs encounter are similar across European countries (e.g. lack of funding), while others differ from one country to another (e.g. participation fees required by the national standardisation organisations). The lack of resources was considered as probably the greatest obstacle but only one of many.

There is sometimes a gap in interest and strategic involvement in standardisation among the different kinds of organisations (environmental, workers and consumers). Consumers are still the most represented group, followed by trade unions, while ENGOs are still the least represented.

Several misconceptions also persist. First, the impact of standards is unknown or underestimated. Standards dictate the market (products, design, etc.) and have a greater impact than one thinks. Secondly, the added value of NGOs is underrated. It is fundamental to change the industry's perception of NGO participation on the one hand, but also translate technical standards into societal concerns on the other.

The **afternoon debates** were opened by **Paolo Falcioni, Director-General of APPLiA.** Mr. Falcioni stressed the importance of involving different stakeholders in the creation of standards and acknowledged the instrumental role played by ECOS in areas of common interest for ECOS and APPLiA, such as Ecodesign for domestic appliances. He was convinced that both the industry and NGOs share the same goals and should work together to create ambitious standards.

Then, **three mini-workshops** allowed the participants to develop a model toolkit for environmental NGO engagement in standardisation at the national level.

> SESSION 1: Busting standardisation myths

Rapporteur: **Davide Sabbadin, Advocacy Consultant at Legambiente**

In order to raise awareness on how and why ENGOs should engage in standardisation, it would be helpful to facilitate ENGOS' access to meetings and committees, as well as to translate documents to national languages so as to make their content available to national experts. The participants also agreed that it was necessary to raise awareness on social, economic and environmental impacts of standards, as well as communicate these facts in simple language.

> SESSION 2: Enabling effective participation at national level

Rapporteur: **Amanda Richardson, Head of External Policy, British Standards Institution**

Funding is not the only barrier, nor is it the only tool. Networking and engagement are important too. Key actions include: facilitating the access to information and understanding of what standardisation activities are currently being undertaken, as well as systematic engagement and support from national standardisation organisations.

> SESSION 3: Towards an organised participation across Europe

Rapporteur: **Chiara Giovannini, Deputy Secretary General, ANEC**

The participants agreed that it was important to focus on the outcome (i.e. the impact of standards on the environment), not the process. They also identified a need for a symmetry in discussions at national level (e.g. access to documents, participation rights), as well as a need for a general, pan-European strategy on how to engage ENGOs and other civil society organisations.

The mini-workshop findings were then presented by the Rapporteurs, and summarised in three illustrations, representative of an "ENGO toolkit" for engaging in standardisation. The latter will be developed and presented by ECOS in the weeks following the event.

Finally, **Ioana Popescu, Programme Manager at ECOS** and coordinator of the [AccESS project](#), reported on the outcomes of this pilot project. She stressed the importance of empowering national NGOs so that they can effectively influence the standardisation system.

The conference was closed by **Greg Archer, President of ECOS**, who delivered his concluding remarks, stressing the role of ECOS in facilitating NGO engagement in standardisation. As ENGOs have more and more tools and resources, effective participation in the standardisation system is increasing. ECOS is prepared to work even harder towards greater inclusiveness, to make sure standards are as environmentally robust as possible.



Brussels, December 2018