

FIEC's Principles for Standardisation

European Standardisation in the Construction Sector: getting the approach right

FIEC takes note of the Commission's Communication and proposed Regulation and welcomes the broad goal of the increased innovation and global competitiveness of European industry but warns that standardisation should not be used as a tool of broader policy aims. Furthermore, in broadening the scope of standardisation, speed to complete standards should not take precedence over their quality or a full consultation process involving all concerned actors.

The construction industry represents over 10% of EU GDP and a preponderate part of the standardisation work in the technical committees of the European Committee for Standardisation (CEN). FIEC, as CEN's first associate member and as the only representative of all sizes of construction enterprise, believes the standardisation process should be to the benefit of all industry actors. Furthermore, while recognizing the key role of standardisation in innovation and the global competitiveness of European enterprise, FIEC does not believe that standardisation should replace legislation as a tool of policy.

It is necessary to distinguish services and product standardization. Whereas in other sectors, standardization of services may be beneficial, in most cases, FIEC opposes European standardisation of execution and installation works in the construction sector as it is either simply a collection of national practices or too vague to be of any value as it seeks to be applicable to all national practices.

Unlike other sectors, given the long-term assets of construction works, innovation in construction products needs to be assessed for its durability and compatibility before standardization, taking into consideration the needs of all the trades involved, can take place.

FIEC wishes to outline the following Principles:

Market Relevance of standards:

1. Standardisation should respond to the needs of the market and should be economically viable. Standards produced for niche markets might make standardization unnecessarily costly and/or might not be based on consolidated knowledge and experience. Whereas regulations may benefit from standards in the construction sector, it is important that standards continue to reflect the state-of-the-art.

It is essential that all concerned stakeholders are involved in the development of standards and at all times it is necessary for CEN to ensure that standards do not introduce obligations on parties not involved in their development.

Confidence in the standardization system and in standards themselves can be reinforced by better screening new proposals for standardization work in order to prevent

an excessive number of standards causing undue confusion and creating extra burdens for those who must apply them.

Access to the process:

2. FIEC believes that standardisation should, wherever possible, be an industry driven, bottom up process involving all concerned parties that have the detailed technical knowledge required to make a valuable contribution.

3. It is essential that standards reflect the state of the art. Standards based on recent scientific results which are only recognised by one or few individuals or organizations will create extra burdens for all actors. Once technically consolidated by the majority of organizations and at a pan-European level, standards act as an essential platform for the dissemination of technical information.

4. Standards should enable fair, unbiased competition within the industry at all levels of the supply chain and should also provide transparent and balanced technical rules for any interface between the different levels of this chain.

5. Before new work items are adopted, CEN should carry out a full impact assessment as to the relevance of the proposed item and give sufficient time for all concerned actors to make their views known, particularly in the case of SMEs. FIEC therefore calls for a mechanism within CEN to ensure that all concerned stakeholders have been properly and fully consulted. Furthermore, during enquiry phase, and regardless of the procedure used, consultation on all drafts should leave ample time for all concerned stakeholders to consult and indicate their position.

6. In the understanding that European standardization is based on representation of national delegates, defending national points of view based on national consultation organized by national standardization bodies, in technical committees of the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), the make-up of national mirror committees should reflect the full range of stakeholders, including users. Since work on drawing up standards should not only reflect the interests of those who have a direct stake in the standard's adoption, it is important that all stakeholders are represented in a sufficient number of national mirror groups.

7. Standards written in support of legislation such as the Construction Products Directive and future Regulation should be written in such a way as to better take into account the production and quality management methods used by craftsmen and SMEs. Scientifically and technically substantiated and reliable solutions should be incorporated in standards preventing or minimizing the need for evaluation (testing, calculation).

8. Publically funded bodies claiming to represent the interests of certain stakeholders should be limited to representing one set of interests. It is unacceptable that publically funded organizations claim to represent, for example, both manufacturers and users of construction products when these interests are clearly different.

9. National standardization bodies, with the help of sectoral professional associations, have a key role to play in raising awareness of the standardisation process among SMEs as well

as encouraging SME participation, directly or through the sectoral professional associations, at national level in mirror committees.

10. In order for standards to meet societal needs, public funding of pre-normative and co-normative research should allow all interested parties, especially SMEs, to collaborate in standardization activities.

Usability of Standards and access to adopted Standards:

1. Standards are often written in a way that prevents their understanding by the SMEs that make up the backbone of the construction industry. Where possible the language of standards should be made clear.

2. In many cases, easy to understand and affordable guidelines explaining finished standards can be useful to practitioners in helping them to apply the standard.

3. Free abstracts of adopted standards should be made available by national standards bodies.