

ETUC Standardisation Newsletter - October 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.

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ETUC Standardisation Committee meeting in Valletta



On 22 October, over 25 representatives of ETUC affiliates attended the second hybrid ETUC Standardisation Committee meeting of 2024, which took place in Valletta, Malta. The first meeting of the year took place in April in Riga, Latvia.

Throughout the day, participants were given updates on policy developments in the field of standardisation – notably, the potential revision of Regulation 1025/2012 – as well as on technical work of ETUC experts contributing to drafting European and international standards that are relevant for workers. Updates were also shared in relation to the progress of the project so far, as well as expected developments planned for 2025, which will mark the 10th Anniversary of ETUC STAND activities.

During the meeting, participants also had the opportunity to discuss priorities, reflect on challenges, and share feedback on each other's work.

The meeting was kindly hosted by ETUC's affiliate in Malta, GWU, in their premises.

The General Workers Union (GWU) of Malta and ETUC meet the Maltese Standardisation Authority (MCCAA)



On 23 October, the GWU – Maltese affiliate of the ETUC – and the ETUC secretariat met up with MCCA, the national standardisation authority of Malta, and Maltese member of European and International standardisation bodies.

During the meeting, Sandro Vella (GWU) informed about GWU activities and contributions to standardisation-related work, including exchanges on standardisation activities related to “Cabin Air quality” in civil airplanes as well as on some national standards.

The GWU enquired about the rising cost of bus driver seats and container straddle carrier seats. It was highlighted that the composition of experts inside the working groups responsible for related standards is a determining factor. Guido De Jongh (ETUC) saw similarities with the rising cost of housing (in e.g. Germany); in [a documentary](#) published by the German public broadcaster, it was noted that German construction standards are “overengineered”.

George Cutajar (MCCA) highlighted that for a small standardisation body – with very limited resources compared to bigger standardisation bodies - following up on the many standardisation activities taking place at European and international level, is not always evident. However, in cases where Maltese stakeholders (industry, societal stakeholders, etc.) have a specific interest, the MCCA weighs into related European and international standardisation activities.

It was concluded that, on occasion of the next World Standards Day (14 October 2025), a Maltese awareness event with involvement of the GWU should be organised.

UNI Europa and ETUC awareness event on standardisation



The ETUC co-organised an [awareness event](#) around standardisation and its relevance for trade unions with affiliate [UNI Europa](#) – the European Services Workers Union.

Industry needs standards and standards are here to stay. But standards no longer cover only technical topics. Step-by-step, technical standards increasingly address services and service provisions. This is partially driven by the European Commission (to create the single

market for services) and partially by the move towards a services-based economy (away from an industry-based one).

Standards impact the conditions and quality of life of workers. Think of criteria that define the safe use of ladders at work. In the EU, these are specified in technical standards, providing one example of how standardisation can impact the health and safety of people in the workplace. This is one of multiple examples that points to the relevance and need for trade union involvement in technical standardisation activities, in order to ensure the voice of workers is effectively brought to the table.

The meeting took place on 4 October and was attended by over 40 participants. Over the course of 3 hours, presentations covered the basics of standardisation, the political context that surrounds it, the implications for workers and practical examples highlighting the relevance for trade union involvement in steering the content of standards that affect workers.

ETUC work on standardisation handbooks has begun



Supported by the external eye of professional journalists, the ETUC has begun working on two handbooks on standardisation. These publications, which will be made available early next year, aim at raising awareness amongst trade unions on - and participation in - standardisation.

Standards at the Workplace

While standards appear invisible, they are present everywhere in our daily lives, and importantly, also affect workers. Many even underpin legislation, such as the EU Machinery Regulation, the Personal Protective Equipment Regulation, or the AI Act. While the impact that standards have on workers is widespread (from the safety of ladders to personal protective equipment in different sectors!), awareness around them is limited. This, however, is critical to ensure meaningful involvement of workers in standard-related matters – from initial implementation phases, to follow up evaluations and action plans. Through the forthcoming ETUC publication “Standards at the Workplace”, we aim at raising

awareness on the importance for workers to know about standards, and through their trade unions, to push for their meaningful implementation at the workplace.

Negotiating the Content of Standards

Trade unionists, new to the standardisation, are often not familiar with related processes and jargon, and are underrepresented in technical meetings. Through a publication on “Negotiating the Content of Standards”, the ETUC will provide a practical tool for trade union representatives wishing to join (or already involved in) technical standardisation activities, by enabling simple access to relevant information on standardisation, as well as through useful tips to be used before, during and after technical meetings (i.e. during the drafting process of standards). Ultimately, the aim of this easy-to-read handbook is to support the strategic participation of trade union representatives in standardisation processes, and in turn, their influence over the content of standards that affect workers.

ETUC English course for trade unionists on standardisation



One of the aims of the ETUC STAND Project is to support the participation of trade unionists in the drafting of standards that impact workers’ lives.

At European and international level, the language used in standardisation is English. Members of technical committees and working groups are asked to contribute to standards, exchange with stakeholders and read documents – all in English. Effective participation in such activities requires a good level of the language – both written and spoken.

This is why the ETUC offered a one-week course to trade unionists interested in standardisation. The course covered various modules, aimed at enabling participants to share proposals, reflect on those of others, provide feedback and negotiate – in support of both their spoken and written English, and ultimately, their meaningful contributions to standardisation work.

The ETUC has offered language training on standardisation for many years now and will

continue to do so, as part of its efforts to support trade unionists to engage effectively in relevant standards.

Addressing health and safety risks from climate change



The world of work is changing as climate change is not only affecting nature, but also workers. More and more, workers work under extreme weather conditions such as heat, floodings and an increased level of air pollution. 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.

To address these health and safety risks, the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) is preparing a Public Specification, named ISO/PAS 45007. This specification is not an international standard, but a lower-tier document that is developed via a fast track with fewer voting stages. The guidance document provides recommendations but does not set requirements for organisations.

The ETUC is participating in this work. Our main objective is to strengthen the consultation and participation of workers and their representatives on issues that are related to health and safety measures at work. In the upcoming months, contributors will need to distinguish between health and safety risks that occur on a regular basis and those that appear specifically in emergency situations. Unfortunately, risks arising from heat or draught are no longer exceptional but have become more regular.

Occupational health and safety measures cannot be appropriately addressed through a standard and are better regulated by legislation. The [ETUC is therefore calling](#) the European Commission to close the gaps in the protection of workers with a directive on maximum working temperatures.

Wellbeing at work



Wellbeing is a positive state and quality of life, which is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Wellbeing is part of everyday life and therefore also plays a role at work.

European and international standard [EN ISO 45001:2018 'Occupational health and safety \(OHS\) management systems — Requirements with guidance for use'](#) does not cover wellbeing. The document provides a framework for organisations to manage risks and improve OHS performance by establishing criteria for a management system.

But as EN ISO 45001 is currently being revised, the International Standardisation Organisation (ISO) is discussing the introduction into the standard of requirements or guidance on wellbeing. This is not an easy task, since wellbeing is a broad concept which extends beyond workers' shifts. But to what extent can a standard set requirements to promote wellbeing and where do the limits lie?

The ETUC Taskforce on OHS standards has discussed the pros and cons of including wellbeing in EN ISO 45001. One of the main conclusions is that wellbeing measures should not replace OHS measures. Whether an organisation has wellbeing measures in place (or not), existing legislative obligations on OHS must be taken into account, including training of workers on health and safety rules. Wellbeing is the outcome of the OHS measures that organisations implement at work. It should be linked to job-related aspects, e.g. measures against harassment at work, more job control, etc. Should measures on wellbeing be introduced, the protection of private data must be safeguarded, and all activities should be voluntary, without penalties.

The ETUC participates actively in the discussions on wellbeing at ISO with a view to protecting workers and safeguarding the highest levels of health and safety. The [ETUC has been calling for a European Directive on the prevention of psychosocial risks at work](#) for many years. The [ETUC resolution](#) adopted in October this year, includes specific demands that will help workers to combat mental stress.

Getting machinery safety fit for the future



Many workers across several sectors, such as industrial production, agriculture and construction work, work with machines. The EU Machinery Directive (2006/42/EC) lays down health and safety requirements for the design and construction of machinery in the European market. But time has passed since the adoption of the Directive. With the development of new technologies, machines are constantly evolving to use novelties such as systems supporting artificial intelligence and human-machine interaction.

As of 2027, a new Machinery Regulation (2023/01230) will replace the existing Directive and cover consumer and industrial machinery, ranging from heavy-duty construction machines over entire industrial production lines, to robots. To respond to the risks that new technologies can pose, the regulation outlines safety requirements for autonomous machines, human-machine collaboration and artificial intelligence.

To help manufacturers with the implementation of the new safety requirements, the machinery standards underpinning the Regulation are currently being revised. This includes the EN 614 series 'Safety of machinery - Ergonomic design principles'. These documents provide the ergonomic principles to be followed in the process of designing machinery and interactions between workers and machines. The first two parts of the standard are now under revision.

The ETUC is participating in the revision of EN 614. Designing machinery has become more complex, as machines are more interactive and the boundaries between machine design and management/leadership are becoming blurred. One of our main objectives is to update the standards in relation to mental stress aspects (such as interruptions, cognitive over- and underload). As human-machine-interaction increases, both the physical and mental health of workers needs to be safeguarded. Of key importance are also the adaptation of the standard to new requirements on artificial intelligence and aspects of "algorithmic management" when designing the machines.

The ETUC continues its work on AI standardisation in Europe...



CEN-CENELEC JTC 21 WG2 'Operational aspects' is commencing work on a new standard addressing Quality Management System (QMS) for EU AI Act regulatory purposes. This is specifically aimed at supporting Article 17 of the Act, which states that: "[...] Providers of high-risk AI systems shall put a quality management system in place that ensures compliance with this Regulation. That system shall be documented in a systematic and orderly manner in the form of written policies, procedures and instructions (...)".

This work is particularly important since all high-risk AI systems placed on the market or put into service in the EU will need to be assessed in accordance with this QMS. The ETUC participated in the WG 2 QMS meeting held on 3 and 4 October in Brussels, where a first early draft of the standard was presented and discussed. The ETUC aims to participate in the following meetings and to contribute actively to the standard.

Additionally, as part of its ongoing work in the development of a European standard on AI Trustworthiness Framework, on 10 October, the ETUC submitted a contribution aimed at contextualising how all the requirements in the standard will need to be articulated in the specific context of the use of AI systems in Human Resources Management. This is highly relevant considering that the use of AI systems in employment is qualified as high risk in the AI Act and will certainly affect the employment relationship.

...and at international level.



Through targeted participation in ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 42 'AI', the ETUC focusses on standards that are of most relevance for workers, namely ISO/IEC 12792 'Transparency taxonomy of AI systems', which is being developed in WG3 'Trustworthiness'. The standard seeks to provide guidelines for establishing a list of elements needed for transparency, and provisions on how to address them in the design of AI systems. The ETUC attended the meeting on 3 October, organised as part of the last round of reconsideration requests prior to the International Standard (IS) publication.

The ETUC succeeded in introducing in the standard references to: the working conditions of data labelling workers, privacy of the workforce, and social dialogue, which should be included in Annex A.

The ETUC further attended the SC 42 Plenary and working groups' meetings that were held in Versailles from 7 to 11 October 2024.

Austrian Chamber of Labour publishes a new study on China's standardisation strategy and future digitalised technologies



The Austrian Chamber of Labour (AK) has published a new study around the strategic use of standards.

China is several thousand kilometres away from us and labour law provisions in a communist-run People's Republic are difficult to compare with the working world in Europe. At a first glance, the topic of standardisation does not appear appealing. Nevertheless, we should consider why the current standardisation policy of the People's Republic of China influences our economic activities – and thus also socio-political factors – and will continue to do so. However, it should not remain a mere consideration, and should instead be followed by timely political action.

In Europe, jobs are constantly being lost due to shrinking export markets and declining competitiveness. European businesses and employees alike are suffering from the fact that Chinese companies are increasingly asserting themselves with their products, which are largely standardised in China, in emerging economic regions. We are not talking about plastic toys or T-shirts, but about high-quality digital technologies with AI elements, used in the fields of smart mobility, satellite radio, big data management, blockchain, metaverse, etc. The study on China's digital economy commissioned by the AK shows: a future trend towards dominance in international standardisation, which is by no means improbable, would affect the majority of innovative, digitalised key industries. This is because achieving normative advantages in digital competition – especially in future-oriented areas such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, network security and quantum technology – ultimately also ensures systemic security. The full – German language – study can be downloaded [here](#).

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