High-Level Forum on European Standardisation

11 November 2024

High-Level Forum recommendations on increasing funding for standardisation activities at international level

Introduction

Standardisation plays a fundamental role for the smooth functioning of the Single market and global leadership in critical technologies. In 2022, The European Standardisation Strategy recognised the need for the EU to be a forerunner in shaping global standard-in line with its values and interests and ensuring future EU standardisation experts to drive the work at international technical committees (TC). It underlined that the EU faces strong competition to achieve this goal. The geopolitical landscape has significantly shifted in recent years as other actors follow a much more assertive approach to international standardisation than the EU and have gained influence in international standardisation committees. The 2nd High-Level Forum (HLF) meeting on 30 November 2023 recognised the lack of funding as one root cause of the insufficient EU participation and influence in international standardisation fora, as part of the HLF survey on increasing European influence in international standard setting. There was an emphasis on:

- Significant shortages of resources and skilled personnel which prevent EU companies from effectively representing EU interest in standard-setting.

- High administrative burdens in terms of costs and complexity prevents experts from obtaining funding in a timely manner to undertake and complete standardisation activities.

- The need for a greater EU representation within international standards technical committees (TC), subcommittees (SCs) and Working Groups (WGs) on topics of EU strategic interest. EU representation should include different economic actors and societal stakeholders.

- The goal of influence should not only be at a convenor level or the National Standards Body (NSB) which holds the secretariat but should also be sufficiently supported via effective and active participation of EU NSBs and industry experts in TCs, SCs and WGs.

Recommendations on increasing funding for standardisation activities at international level

- Real influence comes through technical expertise (good delegates) as well as academic and industry engagement (many delegates) who can propose new work items, put forward technical proposals and can continuously influence the drafting of standards and surrounding discussions.

As a follow up, a Deep Dive was proposed on this topic, with several members of the HLF (annex 2) collaborating in the development this document.

Current challenges and opportunities

There is a noticeable increase in the number of projects dedicated to funding standardisation activities at international level (see a list in Annex 3), either to raise awareness among like-minded partners, collaborate on deliverables, or participate in technical committees. However, these projects have limited scope and there is still room for improvement by channelling some of the available funds to standardisation, especially standards for the digital and green transitions.

The HLF identified the following challenges:

- Different criteria to assess standardisation priorities across the different funding programmes
- Unclear link between pre-standardisation work and input for technical committees.
- Lack of links and coordination with industrial areas and applications.
- Inability of companies -especially SMEs – and universities and research institutions to fund many delegates following standardisation work in support of EU legislative acts and strategic industrial policy areas.
- Discrepancy among Member States's standardisation activities, in terms of their ability to actively participate and fund participation.
- Companies' need for skilled workforce, including standardisation to meet the skill shortages in critical technologies.
- Administrative burdens disincentivising potential applicants to go through the process and/or causes unnecessary delays in standardisation work.
- Untapped potential in many EU funding programmes and partnerships on industrial innovation, development and deployment which do not foresee standardisation and contribution to standardisation TCs as an activity eligible for funding, hence missing an opportunity to valorise results of R&D&I and demonstration projects and programmes.

COMPET Council conclusions on the future of industrial policy

On 24 May, the Competitiveness Council adopted conclusions on 'A competitive European industry driving our green, digital and resilient future'. The conclusions analyse the situation of the EU's industrial sector, explore ways to improve innovation, access to finance and the business environment for manufacturers, and propose the main principles underlying a future EU industrial policy.

Regarding innovation and competitiveness, the conclusions call for the identification of a limited number of strategic priorities in the EU's industrial research and innovation policy. A key task for the Commission could be to bridge the 'innovation paradox' (i.e., the fact that knowledge does not always translate to marketable products and services).

In reference to standardisation, the Council invited the Commission and Member States (MS) to develop a horizontal approach to incorporate the development of standards into research and

innovation in order to accelerate market deployment and contribute to EU leadership in standardisation.

High-Level Forum recommendations

Based on the deep dive discussions and previous HLF analysis on standardisation priorities and European influence at international level:

➔ *The High-level Forum on European Standardisation strongly recommends optimising existing standardisation funding projects at EU level via:*
- Aligning activities to be financed with the priorities of standardisation activities identified by the HLF to create stronger linkages to critical technologies vital for the competitiveness and resilience of the European Economy
- Avoiding bottom-up application procedures to minimise misalignment with the priorities of standardisation activities identified by the HLF.
- Focusing also on funding pre-standardisation work with clear path towards contribution for standardisation deliverables at standardisation development organisations.
- Avoiding proliferation and fragmentation of sector-specific standardisation projects and instead considering a horizontal project with common general rules, including different themes along HLF priorities.

➔ *The High-level Forum recommends to the Commission to set up an incentive mechanism for Member States with lower participation to:*
- Encourage National Standardisation Bodies' participation in international standardisation organisations to support their stakeholders' stronger participation in TC work.
- Allocate funding to National Standardisation Bodies (NSBs)/National Committees (NCs) activisation strategy in areas of strategic EU interest, also focusing on measures on inclusiveness and enhanced, more balanced participation of different economic and social actors within NSBs/NCs. The national standardisation organisations are the members of international standardisation organisations. The influence of Europe at the international level is fully dependent on their activities.

  Therefore, it is important to support those who already participate in international TCs to make them more active (or to have more resources for more experts in the groups and/or for covering more groups) and, secondly, to support the NSBs/NCs that are not participating members (only observers) in the international TCs (because of the lack of resources) to become active full members[1]. The Commission's new exchange platform on international standardisation which aims to foster coordination among MSs and NSBs in international TCs, enables information sharing and hence can avoid a duplication of efforts. Thus, Europe will have a stronger participation in TCs, SCs, and WGs and could also help European SMEs and societal stakeholders to achieve the liaison status in the given TCs and SCs.

  Taking in consideration that EU has 27 members, half of them are not involved in active standardisation work in technical bodies. Only one quarter is actively participating in the

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[1] This includes financial support for travel expenses.

international TCs, and the remaining quarter is involved in some TCs. More resources allocated strategically would help promoting EU priorities and values.

➔ *The High-Level Forum recommends the Commission to fund activities that generate standards more systematically to ensure translating innovation into commercialisation:*

- Multiple EU funding programmes or EU entities generate innovation (JRC, Horizon Europe, and per domains: Circularity, Sustainability etc) or increase manufacturing capacities (IPCEI projects etc), but these activities do not always have an impact on the generation of standards[2].

- As pilots or sandbox these projects – early innovators miss the requirements which would allow mass market deployment. Additionally, they often do not properly link their work to standardisation activities. It would be useful for these projects to ~~work~~ contribute to the drafting of standards to better valorise the innovation/deployment activities

- funded with EU budget as a relevant transfer path of cutting-edge research results. If useful to support legislation, their outcome can contribute to the development of harmonised standards in response to a standardisation request at a later stage.

- Consequently, the budget is there, the intention is there, but not the deliverables and the transformation from research to standards and commercialisation.

➔ *The High-Level Forum recommends the Commission to follow on the request of the Competitiveness Council when considering additional valorisation of project results by increased funding of standards.*

- Use the full array of existing EU research, innovation and demonstration programmes, projects (Horizon, Digital Europe, ETS Innovation Fund, Cohesion Funds, Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform (STEP)) and partnerships (e.g. joint undertakings - (building on the best practice from the Smart Networks and Services Joint Undertaking)) to aid EU industry , including SMEs, and academia with funding of standardisation activities, send more technology experts into international standards committees and hence reinforce EU capacity to set and influence international standards. No new budget is needed for this.

- These should channel more financing to standards-development and participation in technical committees as a way to valorise R&I results, also targeting higher Technology Readiness Levels (TRLs) (from 6-7).

- Follow the example of the inclusion of standardisation related activities in the Guidance on the implementation of the STEP Regulation[3] according to which, the development of critical technologies encompasses activities of developing standards (see p.2 of STEP Guidance) - hence they can be funded. Moreover, standards ensure the performance and scalability of

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[2] Standardisation can serve as a valuable technology transfer instrument to the benefit of outputs of research and its funding. Developing a standard typically takes around 36 months, allowing new technological advancements to be incorporated into the standards emerging from funding programs. This process ensures tangible outcomes and provides valuable contributions to markets establishing. Therefore, also existing technology funding programs (such as the SME component in the GER WIPANO program) should be better linked to standardisation funding in order to support a stronger technology transfer.

[3] https://strategic-technologies.europa.eu/document/download/e204ce9e-0407-4f03-82f8-6f518ce12886_en?filename=C_2024_3148_F1_COMMUNICATION_FROM_COMMISSION_EN_V6_P1_3408774.PDF

these technologies. The Guidance acknowledges that the development and manufacturing of critical technologies in the Union is dependent on advanced European or international standards to ensure the quality, reliability and interoperability of technological solutions, products, and services across the internal market and for global competitiveness. They are also a critical indicator for the maturity and market readiness of technologies, being a positive factor for attracting investments.

- Increase valorisation of project results in these programmes by making standards a part of the projects, guidance documents and KPIs. Additionally, make preparation for and participation in standardisation technical committees in international and global SDOs a cost which is eligible for reimbursement under these projects[4].

- Incorporate in the obligatory projects deliverables requirements also the standards needed to bridge the gap between R&D results and real market implementation (and to sustain the funded research for the future).

- Ensure funding projects set-up will have the appropriate dimensioning (mass market as a target, or "ready for deployment" mindset) as a basis to propose standards. (Not only sandbox)

- Focus on a greener infrastructure by defining projects' scope based on Systems that will evolve to become greener rather than focus on individual components only (e.g. Smart District, Smart Harbour etc.)

➔ ***The High-Level Forum recommends to Member States to evaluate the opportunity of funding mechanisms that foster participation in standardisation processes together with the establishment of industry policy priorities in the areas of green, digital transition, resilience and biotech.***

- Following good practices from certain MSs, MS authorities should fund standardisation projects to accompany strategic policy priorities or action plans and implement standardisation roadmaps. Projects funded could either aim at committee work/content work and participation in international technical committee OR a leadership role in TCs.

➔ ***The High-Level Forum recommends to Member States to provide other incentives for companies including SMEs and stakeholders' associations taking part in standardisation activities (e.g. tax rebates).***

Benefits of funding should not get lost for formal administrative reasons. In case, some Member States consider that they face legal hurdles stemming from EU legislation which prevents them from implementing such incentives, they are invited to inform the HLF and the Commission.

➔ ***The High-Level Forum recommends that the Commission sets up a repository of national best practices when it comes to standardisation funding.*** *A selection of these can already be found in Annex1.*

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[4] It is important to remember that the project timeframe may not always coincide with the standard development timeframe and the project needs to account for travel and accommodation costs but also documents review time.

Annex 1: Best practices in funding standardisation activities in MS

1.1 Denmark - National quantum technology strategy

Funding for standardisation activities

<u>Goal:</u> In its national quantum technology strategy, the Danish government included measures to increase Danish influence in international standardisation in Quantum.

The funding will go to key initiatives including:

- Striving for Denmark to host the secretariat of a European or international technical committee on quantum.
- Bridging researchers, authorities, innovation projects, and standardisation efforts to support the development and dissemination of relevant standards.
- Contributing to Denmark's strategic prioritisation of standardisation activities, including the EU's standardisation work program for 2024.

<u>Timing of the programme:</u> 2024 – 2027

<u>Amount</u>: approx. 800.000 EUR

<u>Who can benefit from it</u>: All companies, researchers

<u>What can be financed</u>:

- Participation free of charge for companies participating in the Danish national mirror committee on Quantum Technologies (Danish Standards' S-874) for a period of time.
- Participation from relevant authorities free of charge responsible for quantum in the technical committee.
- Development of Quantum PAS (Publicly Available Specification).
- Organisation of a Quantum conference, focusing on knowledge sharing and networking in the quantum field, emphasising the importance of standards for the advancement of quantum technology in Denmark. The Danish NSB (Danish Standards) can work actively to seek influence for Denmark through hosting the secretariat of a European or international TC on quantum.

<u>Results in June 2024:</u>

- Danish national quantum mirror committee membership increased from 4 to 15 members.
- Academia actively participating in mirror committee.

1.2 Finance Tax Incentives

- The French decree on standardisation has put in place free participation in standardisation committees for small and medium-sized businesses, societal stakeholders (consumers, environmental associations, trade unions) and academia.

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- Furthermore, the French government and the French NSB signed in 2023 a partnership in order to encourage participation in standardisation activities for beneficiaries of the France 2030 investment plan.

- The French Credit d'Impot Recherche offers tax rebates to enterprises engaged in research, innovation, and development activities, including standardisation.

1.3 Ireland: Access to standardisation

Goal: NSAI, on behalf of Ireland, operates an open and inclusive standardisation system where there are no cost or membership barriers to participation in standardisation. Businesses based in Ireland, SMEs, civil society, academia, experts and other interested organisations are welcome to participate in national standards committees, and through those national committees, in EU and international standardisation.

Timing of the programme: Ongoing

Amount: Free

Who can benefit from it: Membership of NSAI's standards development committees is open to anyone who represents national stakeholder interests such as industry, government, education and research, trade association, consumers and others.

In Ireland a clear best practice example of the promoting the benefits of standards was the Building Better Business events held nationwide during 2023. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment hosted nine events across the country to support Irish businesses navigate the green journey and boost business performance through digital transformation. As part of this Government-wide initiative, NSAI worked closely with other state agencies to provide information on how standards and standardisation can support industry in harnessing the opportunities and overcoming the challenges presented by digital transformation and the transition to a low carbon economy. These events enabled NSAI to share information about the value of standardisation with a wide industry audience. Also, presenting standardisation on a common platform with other national enterprise support agencies, increased awareness across government bodies and policy-makers of the important role that adopting and developing international standards can play in enhancing industry productivity.

What can be financed: NSAI provides free training for those who want to learn about what is involved in participating in a standards committee i.e., registering for a committee, an overview of standards and their benefits, NSAI's relationship with standards organisations and the differences in their memberships. Participants also learn about committee roles and responsibilities as well as specific roles of the Secretariat and Chair.

Results/Lessons learned: NSAI operates specific schemes to provide financial assistance to standardisation experts, in particular to attend international standardisation meetings. However, as participation in standardisation can be a significant time and financial commitment for standards experts and their employers, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and NSAI are investigating other measures, including financial supports that could be implemented, to support SMEs, researchers, and civil society to engage in international standardisation.

1.4 Germany: Supports SME in the field of standardisation

Germany aims to foster not only the emergence of innovations, but also their rapid dissemination - through knowledge and technology transfer. Within this concept the funding programe "WIPANO - Knowledge and Technology Transfer through Patents and Standards" exists in its third funding period. In the field of standardisation, the transfer of latest research results into standards is promoted. Furthermore, especially SMEs are supported for their participation in national and international standardisation committees with the particular SME component of the program.

- With the help of standards, the rate of diffusion of innovative products, technologies and services developed in research-projects is supposed to be secured and accelerated. Small and medium-sized enterprises in consortium with research facilities are granted funding of eligible project-related costs up to Euro 200,000 per project.

Within the SME component financial support for SMEs engaging in national or international standards work is provided enabling them to dispatch qualified professionals to actively participate in standardisation committees and thus participating setting standards themselves. Funding with up to Euro 45,000 of personnel costs, participation and traveling expenses with regard to (inter)national standardisation committees, with up to Euro 5,000 for standards research and management, and with up to Euro 10,000 for DIN Spec PAS, VDE Spec PAS or VDE standards development is provided. In addition, it is also possible to commission experts of third parties.

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Annex 2: HLF members participating in the deep dive

Coordinator

- DIGITALEUROPE

Participants

- EU and EEA Countries: Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovakia

- Type C organisations: AIOTI, CEN, CENELEC, European DIGITAL SME Alliance, SBS, T&D Europe

Annex 3: Projects funding standardisation activities

[BlockStand](#):

BlockStand supports the increased participation of European experts in Blockchain and DLT (Distributed Ledger Technologies) standardisation activities. The project aims to create an online blockchain community comprised of all stakeholders, that shall engage in continuous collaboration and exchange of ideas to bolster the European Union's leadership in the field.

[CyberStand](#):

CYBERSTAND.eu aims to empower European stakeholders to engage in the development of standards and conformity in relation to the Cyber Resilience Act (CRA). The project will select and onboard more than 200 experts through 6 cycles of Specific Service Procedures (SSPs), assigning a total of 1.500.000 € for developing and working on harmonised standards.

[InDiCo-Global](#)

InDiCo-Global, a Horizon Europe Coordination and Support Action, builds bridges between technical communities and policy makers globally, on topics relating to Digital policies and ICT standardisation. InDiCo-Global aims to develop mutual understanding of policy, regulatory and technical approaches to ICT/digital technologies, enhance cooperation on ICT standards and alignment in policies and regulations, leading to a wider use of common standards for the benefit of European industry. Over its 36 months duration, InDiCo-Global will direct 40% of its €2.5 million budget to Capacity Building initiatives through a series of open calls for micro-projects focused on the targeted regions.

[Seeblocks](#)

SEEBLOCKS.eu is a 24-month Digital Europe Programme project that aims at delivering a targeted, democratic, industry-driven initiative to support European interests in standardisation within the Blockchain/DLT domain, bringing together EU researchers and open standards specialists, along with industry and policy experts. The project will implement an impact-focused and mature workplan in the interests of the European Blockchain/DLT constituencies and initiatives, tapping into a multi-disciplinary group of experts (funded through a series of 4 recurring Selecting and Engaging Procedures - SEPs) to facilitate streamlined and effective standardisation processes through

cooperation and collaboration, which are key features necessary to guarantee continued dialogue from a regulatory, governmental, policy, business and technology perspective.

Small Business Standards (SBS) Annual SMEs experts call[5]

SBS is launches an annual open call to appoint experts to represent the interests of SMEs in Technical Committees (TCs), Sub-Committees (SCs) and Working Groups (WGs) of CEN, CENELEC, ETSI, ISO and IEC (see page 6 for links to the lists of technical bodies of the respective organisation). Experts will be appointed for one year and their appointment is renewable. The call is co-funded by the European Union and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

StandICT

StandICT.eu 2026 builds on the success of the previous two editions [2020-23 & 2018-19 StandICT.eu initiatives], obtaining the recognition of the "go-to" project on ICT Standards in Europe. StandICT.eu 2026's principal goal is to strengthen its global reach in the European ICT Standardisation Ecosystem. The project's Fellowship Programme funds standardisation expert with a budget of € 2,925,000 earmarked over 36 months with 9 Open Calls.

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[5] And similar annex III organisations' funding schemes