

The impact of standards on the world of work in Europe

European and international standards have played a major role in the construction of the single market. Although some studies have assessed the economic impact of standards, their influence on the world of work has been largely overlooked. Yet standards are increasingly used for regulatory purposes.

1

• Beware of standards

The existence of standards and other voluntary regulatory initiatives addressing work-related issues calls for greater attention. Such initiatives have the potential to either, extend or undermine social dialogue. While this recommendation calls for greater trade union attention to private forms of regulation, irrespective of the topic, it also serves as a reminder of the specificities of service standards regarding their propensity to interact and conflict with existing national regulations.

2

• Be there

Standards matter for workers and the participation of trade unions is of uttermost importance either to promote workers' interests or to pursue a damage limitation strategy in the standards development process. The participation of trade union goes beyond their sole contribution in standardisation committees. Participation in standardisation has to be located within a broader political continuum ranging from legislative processes and collective bargaining to standardisation committees and public accreditation services – and at some point on this continuum, trade unions have to be there.



Service standards can, under certain conditions, benefit working conditions and social dialogue.

Such benefits include the influence of service standards in providing a level playing field, their positive impact on workers and their environment, for instance in terms of training opportunities or privacy at work.



3



Follow the standards

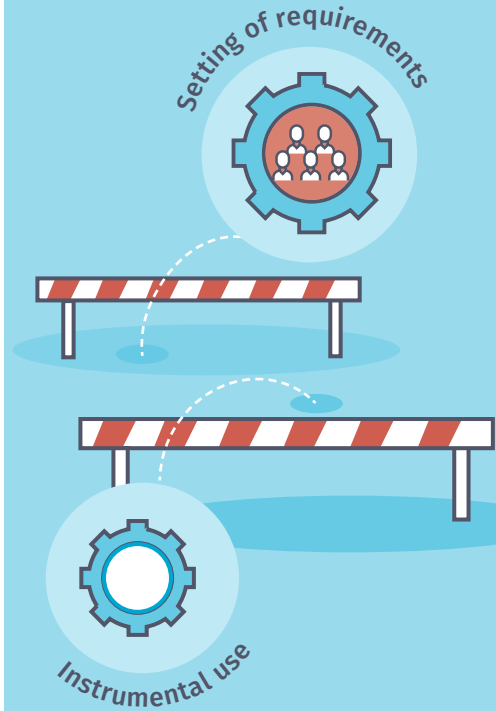
This recommendation underlines the need for an effective involvement of workers' representative during the implementation of a standard at company level and points towards the possibilities to provide them with guidance. Such involvement and guidance are aimed at preserving the hard-won points during the technical committee deliberations as well as to avoid pick-and-choose strategy during the implementation.

4



Embed the standards

The embeddedness of standardisation in social dialogue structure largely contributes to the positive outcomes of a service standard and to prevent negative implications. Services standardisation does not occur in a vacuum and its outcome is also shaped by the national institutions, including social dialogue structure and traditions. This, in turn, underlines the prime importance of building strong and lively social dialogue structure, including at European level, to foster the desired outcomes of services standards.



Yet, significant evidence points at the potential pitfalls of service standards for workers, including **the setting of requirements that contradict existing labour laws and collective agreements or lead to inferior working conditions**. The instrumental use of standardisation to **by-pass difficult collective bargaining process in the service sector** has also been identified as a potential risk.



Find more information
in the study:

The role of international and European
standards in shaping the world of work
in the European service sector

etuc.org/en/etuc-stand-studies

The ETUC is the voice of workers and represents 45 million members from 90 trade union organisations in 38 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations.

The ETUC STAND project aims at sustaining and reinforcing trade union representation and effective participation in European standardisation.

etuc.org/en/issue/standardisation  [@ETUC_standards](https://twitter.com/ETUC_standards)

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