

Enhancing SME Access to Standards

ISS Report 2023

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Introduction

This report details the Institute for Standardization of Serbia's (ISS) efforts to fulfill Article 6(3) of the EU Regulation on Standardization 1025/2012 throughout 2023. Article 6(3) mandates National Standards Bodies (NSBs) in the EU to report annually on activities that “encourage and facilitate the access of SMEs to standards and standards development processes” and share best practices with other EU NSBs.

Although Serbia remains in the EU accession process, it proactively embraces the regulation's spirit. Relevant provisions have been incorporated into:

- Law on Standardization (“Official Gazette of RS”, No.36/2009 and 46/2015)
- Decision amending the Founding Act of the ISS (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 27/2016)
- Statute of the ISS (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 29/2017)

This commitment reflects the critical role of SMEs in Serbia's economy. Notably, 99.8% of active companies are SMEs, employing nearly two-thirds of non-financial sector employees and contributing 32% to the national GDP.

Most important event in 2023 - Serbia hosted major European Standardization Event

The Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) proudly hosted the 2023 CEN-CENELEC General Assembly Meeting in Belgrade, marking a significant milestone for the organization as the newest full member of the CEN-CENELEC family. From June 19th to 22nd, the event brought together about 200 delegates from 34 European countries, representing the most important gathering for the European standardization community.

This historic event, held in Serbia for the first time, saw the 59th CEN General Assembly, 65th CENELEC General Assembly, 15th CEN-CENELEC Common Session, and Administrative Board meetings take place alongside bilateral talks and panel discussions. Over four days, representatives from all European national standardization bodies engaged in productive dialogue and collaboration.

The initial two days focused on meetings for CEN and CENELEC Administrative Board members, with both in-person and online participation. The following days featured key events, including a closed session for delegation leaders, a joint session for all delegates, and separate sessions for CEN and CENELEC members. Three engaging panel debates were also held, with one dedicated to celebrating the 30th anniversary of the single European market.

The ISS team successfully managed this large-scale event with the valuable support of sponsors and partner organizations. This achievement underscores the organization's growing role and commitment to contributing to the European standardization landscape.

While specifically targeted at the standardization community, the widespread promotion of the event through mainstream media, including newspaper and TV announcements, significantly boosted the Institute's visibility and generated broader interest in standardization efforts.

Deepening and Diversifying Collaboration with SMEs in 2023

In 2023, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) built upon its existing relationships with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and ventured into exciting new initiatives. We proudly continued offering established support services while simultaneously introducing innovative approaches to foster deeper and more diverse collaboration.

News in 2023

A) Upgraded ISS website

In a major step forward, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) launched a completely refreshed and user-friendly website in the first quarter of 2020. This enhanced platform offers several key improvements:

- **More data:** Users now have access to a wider range of standards information, including drafts and technical regulations.
- **Easier access:** Streamlined navigation and search functionality make finding the information you need quicker and more intuitive.
- **Interactive features:** Submit online comments on draft standards during public enquiries, directly contributing to the standardization process.
- **Expanded terminology:** Explore a vastly enriched terminology database with approximately 30 000 terms and definitions.

These advancements demonstrate ISS's commitment to transparency, accessibility, and user engagement. The new website empowers individuals and organizations across Serbia to actively participate in the development and implementation of standards, ultimately contributing to a stronger and more efficient national standardization system.

B) ISS confirmed its commitment to gender responsive standards

On 1 February, 2023, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia signed the UNECE Declaration on Gender Responsive Standards, thereby confirming its commitment to the development of standards, guidelines and practices that are in line with the principles of gender equality.

After signing the Declaration, representatives of the Institute attended a regional workshop on developing action plans for gender responsive standards, organized by ISO in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) from June 7 to 9, 2023. Based on the workshop's recommendations and guidelines, the Institute formed a working group to develop an action plan for developing gender-responsive standard.

The objectives of the action plan are to:

- Increase the participation of women in NTCs, especially in the field of electrical engineering.
- Develop guidelines and promotional materials for all participants in the standards development process.
- Expand cooperation with organizations, institutions, and associations to raise awareness of

- the importance of gender responsiveness in standards.
- Establish a mechanism to monitor progress and report on achieved goals.
- The Action Plan for the Development of Gender Responsive Standards is available on the website of the Institute for Standardization (ISS) https://iss.rs/en/aktsioni-plan-za-razvoj-rodno-odgovornikh-standarda-2023-2030_p1379.html, as well as on the web site of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) <https://www.iso.org/strategy2030/key-areas-of-work/diversity-and-inclusion.html>.

C) ISS further improves the Construction Products Portal to empower SMEs

The Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) took a major step forward in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with the launch of the Construction Products Portal in 2022, as well as its further improvement during 2023. This valuable resource offers manufacturers, distributors, importers, and other stakeholders clear and accessible information on regulations and standards for trading construction products on both the domestic and single European market.

- Focus on SMEs:

Recognizing the crucial role of SMEs in Serbia's economy, the portal is specifically designed to cater to their needs.

The user-friendly interface and comprehensive information empower SMEs to navigate the often complex world of standardization, conformity assessment, testing, and product approval.

- Portal Features:
 - a) Regulations and Standards: Find relevant regulations and harmonized standards applicable to different construction products.
 - b) Market Access: Gain insights into requirements for placing construction products on the domestic and European markets.
 - c) Conformity Assessment: Understand the processes and procedures for ensuring product compliance with regulations.
 - d) Testing and Approval: Discover accredited laboratories and bodies authorized to conduct testing and issue approvals.
- Collaboration for Development:

The Construction Products Portal is a testament to successful international collaboration. Developed in partnership with the Czech Office for Standards, Metrology and Testing (ÚNMZ), the portal leverages Czech expertise to benefit Serbian businesses.

- Open Communication:

By launching the portal and other website improvements, ISS reinforces its commitment to open and transparent communication with all stakeholders.

This dedication to accessibility fosters trust and empowers customers, members, standards buyers, seminar participants, and especially SME representatives to fully engage with the standardization process.

Overall, the Construction Products Portal represents a significant advancement in supporting Serbian SMEs and promoting a more competitive and efficient construction sector.

D) Free of charge publications published in Serbian and/or translated in Serbian

Each year ISS offers to its customers a large number of new publications (some are free of charge). Free of charge publications are available for download from ISS web site, while other publications can be ordered and purchased.

1) ISS Bulletin “Standardization” delivering diverse insights in 2023

The Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) continued its impactful quarterly publication, the Bulletin “Standardization”, throughout 2023. Each issue offered a rich tapestry of topics, showcasing the dynamism of the standardization field.

Highlights from the four editions included:

- Emerging voices: Young professionals shared their experiences in national standardization, offering fresh perspectives and insights.
- Innovation in action: Award-winning projects from the competition demonstrated the transformative power of innovative approaches.
- Modern revolutions: Articles explored the impact of technology on industries like agriculture and sports, highlighting efficiency gains and performance optimization.
- European focus: An interview with the CEN and CENELEC Director General shed light on the European standardization landscape, and an exploration of the single market's 30th anniversary emphasized its continued relevance.
- Local challenges: Crucial topics like designing earthquake-resistant structures and ensuring safe outdoor recreation received dedicated attention.
- Sustainable solutions: The role of electric transportation in supporting the green transition was comprehensively examined.

By delving into such diverse subjects, the Bulletin “Standardization” serves as a solid resource for professionals, researchers, and anyone interested in the impact of standardization.

2) Promoting gender equality through standardization: ISO and UNECE Publications in Serbian

The Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) takes a major step towards inclusivity by translating one ISO and two key UNECE publications into Serbian. These publications are now available for free download on the ISS website, expanding access to valuable knowledge and resources for Serbian professionals and stakeholders. The publications are:

1. https://iss.rs/sr_Cyrl/download/page-section/document/15160,
2. https://iss.rs/sr_Cyrl/download/page-section/document/15159,
3. <https://iss.rs/en/download/page-section/document/14951>.

Also, links to download translations can now be found on the UNECE website: ECE/TRADE/472, <https://unece.org/trade/publications/guidelines-developing-gender-responsive-standards-ecetrade472> as well as ECE TRADE 474, <https://unece.org/info/Trade/WP.6/pub/381789>.

These translations directly support the Institute's commitment to the UNECE Declaration on

Gender Responsive Standards, signed in February 2023. This commitment underscores ISS's focus on developing standards, guidelines, and practices that actively promote gender equality and inclusion.

By making these publications available in Serbian, the ISS aims to empower all interested parties within the Republic of Serbia to actively participate in achieving its Gender Action Plan (GAP), i.e. <https://iss.rs/en/download/page-section/document/14899> goals. This ambitious plan prioritizes gender equality in standardization, raises awareness of its importance, and encourages wider participation in developing national standards with a gender-responsive perspective.

E) ISS supports women's entrepreneurship

Supporting women's entrepreneurship isn't just about gender equality (SDG 5), it's about powering economic growth and social progress. Statistics show that women in Serbia founded more than 30% of businesses, but further growth requires removing barriers.

Here's where standards come in as powerful tools for women entrepreneurs:

- Leveling the playing field: Standards provide a common language and best practices, giving women entrepreneurs equal footing with their male counterparts.
- Boosting efficiency: From quality management to risk management, standards offer solutions for streamlining business processes and saving valuable time and resources.
- Compliance made easy: Understanding and adhering to relevant standards ensures legal compliance, reducing the risk of penalties and reputational damage.
- Building trust and credibility: Implementing standards demonstrates professionalism and commitment to quality, enhancing customer trust and attracting new business opportunities.

ISS strives to empower women entrepreneurs with the knowledge and tools they need to thrive, and encourage them to explore how standards can unlock their full potential and contribute to a more equitable and prosperous future.

In 2023, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) partnered with the Association of Business Women of Serbia to empower four of their member companies. Through this impactful project, these businesses received expert guidance and training on applying quality management standards, and are now fully prepared for certification according to:

- ISO 9001: Ensuring quality management systems for consistent customer satisfaction.
- ISO 14001: Implementing Environmental Management Systems for sustainability and reduced environmental impact.
- ISO/IEC 27001: Establishing Information Security Management Systems to protect confidential data.

By actively participating in ISS training programs, these women-led businesses gained the knowledge and tools to significantly improve their operations.

This collaboration showcases the powerful impact of standards in driving business growth and empowering women entrepreneurs.

F) ISS participation in national fairs - a powerful platform for standards engagement

National standards bodies like ourselves know the value of participating in, and even co-hosting, national and international fairs. It's an opportunity to connect with various stakeholders grasping

the opportunity to generate more sales by offering standards, training, and implementation guidance, establish new connections with potential partners and collaborators, raise awareness of standards through face-to-face interactions, NTC secretaries answered questions and clarified misconceptions, directly engaged with key players - the SME sector helping them to understand how standards can benefit their specific needs and challenges, as well as offer personalized support, etc.

ISS at the 18th International Energy Fair and the 19th Fair of Ecology and Environmental Protection and Natural Resources

As part of its participation in this year's ecology fair, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) has showcased 64 standards in the field of ecology, providing attendees with valuable insights into the standardization landscape. In the dedicated "B2B" events area, ISS presenter, kicked off the day with a presentation titled "Standards and Ecology". Attendees gained a comprehensive understanding of the most crucial standards in this field and their significance in shaping a sustainable society. Standardization plays a pivotal role in environmental protection and natural resource conservation. It establishes minimum requirements that must be met to ensure the sustainability of products, services, and processes, minimizing their negative environmental impact.

Concurrently with the presentation's conclusion, ISS hosted an engaging mini-quiz, allowing visitors to delve into fascinating facts about ISS endeavours and the significance of standards adoption.

ISS at the 47th SEEBBE – BUILDING TRADE FAIR

The Building Trade Fair in Belgrade became the most important specialized fair event in this branch in the entire region of South East Europe, hence ISS intention to actively participate and reach out to the widest audience in the field of the most diverse segments of the construction industry - from research and design, through the construction and maintenance of buildings in high-rise construction, civil engineering and hydraulic engineering, to the presentation of the most modern materials, construction machines, devices and tools.

G) Increasing the number of NTC and ISS Assembly members

Adoption of standards takes place through the work of technical expert bodies, that consist of representatives of all interested parties: business, scientific and educational institutions, state bodies, associations and others. In the system of national standardization, SRPS standards are adopted within 163 currently active NTCs (KS), with a total of more than 1,500 members. The number of members in one NTC varies from three to more than 20, and the harmonization of their views is achieved by consensus.

In the current year, 57 new experts, representatives of 30 institutions and organizations, have joined 15 NTCs, while one existing member has changed organizations. 37 new experts will work on adopting Serbian standards in the general areas of standardization, and 20 of them will participate in electrotechnical standardization. Among them are 18 PhDs and 5 Masters.

The new NTC members originate from 12 companies mostly originating from SMEs, 7 scientific and research institutions, 5 faculties, 5 state bodies (including 3 ministries), as well as 1 entrepreneur.

In addition, ISS Assembly increased the number of its members by 7, mostly from MSME sector.

H) ISS Deepens Collaboration with Regional Chambers of Commerce

Building on its existing network of Infocenters for reading standards within regional chambers of commerce, in December 2023, the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (ISS) embarked on a valuable study visit. ISS Representatives visited the Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Kolubara and Mačva Administrative Districts in Valjevo, fostering stronger relationships and

showcasing key services.

Sharing Expertise and Resources:

- ISS representatives delivered a comprehensive presentation detailing the diverse services available to customers, including access to standards, technical consultations, and training programs.
- The Construction Products Portal, a new resource offering valuable information on regulations and standards for trading construction products, was also highlighted.

Encouraging Dialogue and Feedback:

- Attendees actively participated in the session, exchanging opinions and experiences related to standardization needs and challenges within their region.
- Open Q&A sessions provided a platform for addressing specific concerns and clarifying any uncertainties.

I) Report on realized ISS trainings in 2023

- a. Total number of realized trainings: 48
 - Free of charge trainings: 5 trainings
 - Commercial trainings: 43 trainings
- b. Total number of training participants: 533
 - Free of charge trainings: 206 participants
 - Commercial trainings: 327 participants

The largest number of participants in all trainings originate from the SME sector.

J) Seminar for ISS NTC members - ISS Invests in Serbian experts

ISS invests in the development of domestic expertise by hosting the seminars for experts and professionals involved in adopting Serbian standards. These events, embedded in the annual work program, deliver:

- Up-to-date insights: Participants gain timely information on the latest developments in international, European, and national standardization landscapes.
- Enhanced knowledge: Experts acquire specialized skills and knowledge related to standards and standardization processes.
- Effective contributions: The training empowers participants to work efficiently and contribute significantly to national technical committees (NTCs).

Beyond the seminar:

In 2024, ISS continues to actively coordinate the participation of Serbian experts in various capacities:

- Proposing, developing, and revising international standards and related documents.
- Engaging in technical working bodies of ISO, IEC, CEN, and CENELEC.

A key focus lies on increasing the involvement of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in standardization. This not only empowers their professional development but also benefits the overall progress of national standardization.

Overall, ISS actively cultivates a national pool of standardization experts, fostering informed participation, effective collaboration, and ultimately, a robust and innovative standardization landscape in Serbia.