

ISS and SMEs in 2020 – Facing the challenges

(Report on ISS activities to facilitate SMEs participation in the standardization process)

Belgrade, January 2021

Introduction

The year 2020, mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, changed and modified our daily lives, affected our business activities, tested our ability to quickly adapt as a society and business world and transform and reflect upon the goals and plans we set in the previous years.

This Report outlines how ISS, as the National Standards Body of the Republic of Serbia, has fulfilled the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Regulation on Standardization 1025/2012 during 2020. This Article requires all EU National Standards Bodies (NSBs) to provide annual reports on how they have “encouraged and facilitated the access of SMEs¹ to standards and standards development processes” and how they have exchanged best practices on SME participation with other EU NSBs.

Taking into consideration that the Republic of Serbia is in the accession process with EU, the provisions of the EU Regulation on Standardization 1025/2012 have been integrated in the Law on Standardization (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 36/2009 and 46/2015), Decision amending the Founding Act of the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 27/2016), as well as the Statute of the Institute for Standardization of Serbia (“Official Gazette of RS”, No. 29/2017).

ISS activities in 2020

Similar to many national standardization organizations in Europe and all over the world, because of the government security measures to protect the population from the pandemic, ISS employees worked from home. After a short period of adaptation to somewhat different working conditions and environment, ISS business activities were largely adapted to the new circumstances.

ISS maintained good and strong cooperation with SMEs, continued to perform previously established activities, but also refreshed, improved, designed and implemented new activities and ways of collaborative work with SMEs.

I News in 2020

- Redesigned website

In the first quarter of 2020, ISS launched the new, redesigned ISS website. Based on the comments and remarks of the visitors to the new website, as well as our customers, especially SME representatives, standards buyers, NTC members and participants in the seminars and trainings, the new ISS website offers:

1. easier search of standards and publications,
2. more data and easier access to the texts of standards drafts,
3. the possibility to send online comments on the texts of the standards that are on public enquiry,
4. specially dedicated link to SMEs containing the information on how to participate in the national standardization process, or attend seminars in specific areas, or receive the newsletters on ISS work, etc.
5. overall easier access and more transparent to the documents and information in general.

¹ Small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurs (SMEs) represent an important segment of Serbian industry: 99,8% of all active companies are SMEs, they employ nearly 2/3 employees in the non-financial sector and participate with 32% in the Serbian GDP.

- **Free of charge access to the standards for protective equipment and medical devices**

Following up on the CEN and CENELEC Presidential Committee decision that replied to the extraordinary challenge in the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic globally, ISS allowed all interested parties, SMEs in particular, to freely download national adoptions of the European standards in the field of personal protective equipment and medical devices. At first, 14 standards were made available, and later 20 more standards were added to the list of the free accessed standards.

- **Free of charge publications translated in Serbian and/or published in Serbian**

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

In 2020, ISS translated and posted on the website for free download the following ISO publications:

- a) Contributing to the UN sustainable development goals with ISO standards, and
- b) ISO 22301 – Business continuity.

Also, ISS wanted to help its customers, primarily SMEs, to overcome the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. After organizing webinars the aim of which was to familiarize customers with how to ensure and maintain business continuity in the difficult circumstances, and then enable free download and online reading of standards in the area of business continuity.

ISS published the document „COVID-19 crisis: From managerial theory to practice“ in Serbian language. This publication represents the collection of authorized lectures prepared by the crisis management experts. In addition to the fact that this collection contains specific examples related to crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic experts presented their valuable experience in managing various crisis situations, so that the users of the collection can apply the presented examples and advice in this, as well as any other future crisis situation.

- **Improving the work of ISS Infocenters in six Serbian cities**

In order to continuously improve its services and strengthen the connection with the customers, especially originating from SMEs, ISS organized and on-line meeting with the representatives of the Infocenters in the Regional Chambers of Commerce and Industry in Subotica, Novi Sad, Valjevo, Niš and Zaječar. These Infocenters for standards were established at the end of 2018 and as ISS has introduced numerous new services since, the meeting which was organized was an opportunity to present them, but also to exchange experiences and impressions in the work, so far. At the same time, the participants pointed out the problems they were facing in their work and gave useful suggestions for improving the work of the Infocenters, as well as for their promotion.

At the meeting, the new ISS website was introduced to the participants of the meeting and the new standards search system was presented. Additionally, the possibilities of free download of standards related to medical and protective equipment were presented.

Also, special attention was drawn to the organization of webinars referring to the different standardization topics, that have lately been the focus of interest of ISS customers.

- **Free webinars and trainings**

The usual organization of seminars, round tables, workshops and other types of trainings had to be modified, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The modifications primarily referred to the topics that were planned in the ISS 2020 Work Program and Business Continuity Plan, as well as to the manner of their presentation, i.e. webinars, ZOOM meetings. Namely, the topics mainly covered various aspects of adapting and working in the current crisis situations, such as:

- a) Business continuity management for SMEs during and after COVID-19 pandemic,
- b) Risk management in crisis situations,
- c) Health aspects of the COVID-19,
- d) Communication during the crisis situation,
- e) Medical devices in the focus of the fight against COVID-19
- f) Disaster risk assessment and plans for protection and rescue.

In addition, upon the request from the customers, ISS repeated the webinars which covered the standards in the fields of: personal data protection, quality management particularly remote audit, construction and civil engineering, LVD and EMC regulations and standards, etc.

During 2020, ISS organized 11 different free webinars and 27 commercial ones. All trainings were attended by more than 1 200 participants and 19 topics were presented and/or discussed during the sessions. 770 participants registered for the free webinars, and nearly 77% (593) of them were the representatives of SMEs.

- **Providing technical assistance in standards implementation**

One of the services ISS is offering to the customers is providing assistance in the preparation of the working documents and procedures for certification of quality, environment, information security and other management systems. In 2020, several SMEs submitted their requests to ISS, and after the completed preparation activities will be certified according to SRPS ISO 9001:2015.

II Other activities in 2020

ISS recognizes that SMEs represent a huge and significant segment of Serbian industry and as such, provides a number of mechanisms for their greater involvement and participation in the standards development process, at the national, international and European level. Fostering and nurturing business relations with the SMEs, in the long run, will result in mutual benefit for these companies, but also for the national standardization in general.

SMEs continued involvement in national standardization process

ISS is committed to further enhance the number of SME representatives as active NTC members and contribute to the standards development. One of the incentives for this is that there is no charge to participate in ISS TCs and SMEs are not required to become a member of ISS in order to do so. ISS has 160 active NTCs that follow up on the work of CEN, CENELEC, ISO, IEC and ETSI TCs. Taking into account the fact that SMEs represent more than 98% of all companies who take part in Serbian economy, it can be concluded that their representatives are the most represented in the national TC membership.

Contacting the clients originating from SMEs in order to get their feedback on the overall cooperation with ISS, resulted in improving and enhancing the scope of several services and activities ISS introduced in the previous period, such as:

- The possibility of purchasing standards with 15% discount for NTC members;

- For SMEs that provide educational services in the field of standardization, ISS offers special discount for purchasing a number of copies of the same standard for the participants of the educational sessions;
- A possibility to subscribe on the one-year on-line access to the bulk of Serbian standards in a chosen standardization field or on the whole collection of Serbian standards is a new ISS service and it is expected that SMEs show interest for using it;
- TC members, including those from SMEs, are able to participate in free of charge training courses that are relevant to standardization. These courses include understanding international, European and national standardization processes, procedures for the participation in the CEN/CENELEC committee meetings.

Open door for SMEs

ISS offers this free of charge service called “open door for SMEs” of providing information on the requirements stipulated in Serbian standards and related documents for a while now. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this service was rarely realized in 2020. However, after the consultations with the employees from the Infocenters in the six Regional Chambers of Commerce, who informed us of the interest shown by SMEs in their regions, ISS intends to activate further this service by visiting the Regional Infocenters on a regular basis.

All national regulations, directives and Serbian standards on ISS web page

Full texts of national regulations referencing Serbian standards are posted on ISS website and can be downloaded freely. All users of the regulations and standards who wish to be kept informed about the current national regulations in force in the Republic of Serbia that contain references to Serbian standards, as well as their relation to directives, can browse up-to-date information on these documents, in a comprehensive and user-friendly way, on ISS website.

In addition, SMEs are encouraged to submit new standard projects and take part in their adoption as national standards, and thus help themselves to boost and improve their business and affirmation on the market.

Terminology database

The detailed information on the cross-reference between terms and definitions in English and Serbian language and their reference in Serbian standards is available via the Terminology Database link on ISS web page. At this time, this database consists of more than 24 500 terms, and it is very useful means for better understanding of standards.