



30 October 2013

<b>Call to Participate in the ISO 26000 Systematic Review</b> IOE Member Communication (G-349)	
For information/action:	Action – please engage
Deadline:	15 March 2013
IOE contact:	<a href="#">Matthias Thorns</a>
Attachment(s):	ISO launch of Systematic Review IOE Fact Sheet on ISO 26000

As you are aware, ISO 26000 was launched in November 2010. The IOE has always underlined that **this guidance standard is addressed to all kinds of organisation; it is not a management standard and it should not be used for certification purposes.**

On 15 October 2013, ISO launched a five-month Systematic Review of ISO 26000 (please see attachment). The questions being put to the national ISO member bodies are:

- ❖ Should ISO 26000 be confirmed, revised/amended, converted into another form of deliverable, or withdrawn?
- ❖ Has ISO 26000 been adopted, or is it intended to be adopted, as a national standard or other publication?
- ❖ Is the national publication identical, or proposed to be identical, to the International Standard or modified?
- ❖ Is ISO 26000 used in your country without national adoption, or are products used in your country based on this standard?

You may be aware that **there are on-going discussions on creating a certifiable ISO standard for social responsibility**, and some have already been created at national level (in Denmark and Spain). Although the information on the review stresses that no modification to the current scope of ISO 26000 is possible and that any change to the scope of the standard would require a new proposal to be drafted, ISO also emphasises that if the majority of voters indicate a need for a Management System Standard based on ISO 26000, the Post Publication Organization (PPO) would liaise with the ISO Central Secretariat to approach one of the members requesting this change, so that a New Work Item Proposal for such a standard could be prepared.

**It is therefore of the utmost importance that you engage with your national standardisation body to ensure that there is no request from your country for new standard setting for a certifiable ISO 26000. It would also be helpful if you could keep me informed of any action on your part.**

We attach for your convenience the IOE Fact Sheet on ISO 26000. If you need any further support, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**ISO Central Secretariat**

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**TO THE ISO MEMBER BODIES**

Your ref.  
Our ref. ISO 26000 SR

Date 2013-10-15

**ISO 26000 Systematic review**

Dear Sir or Madam,

The systematic review for ISO 26000 *Social responsibility* has been launched today. Although the timing for the systematic review of an ISO standard is now five years, the period for this standard is shortened to three years as it was announced in the Working Group (WG) on Social Responsibility, before being disbanded.

A Post Publication Organization (PPO) was formed after the WG was disbanded. The PPO conducts an annual survey for ISO 26000 which this time will be launched shortly after the systematic review. The ISO 26000 survey is a useful tool to gather additional information regarding the use and implementation of the standard. All ISO members are therefore encouraged to vote on the systematic review but also to respond to the survey. In addition, international organizations that were in liaison with the previous WG are being invited to submit comments on the systematic review for ISO 26000.

In order to assist you with any questions regarding the ISO 26000 systematic review process, we invite you to consult the attached Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. A more general [FAQ document](#) also exists for the systematic review process on the electronic balloting portal.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin McKinley', written in a cursive style.

Kevin McKinley  
Deputy Secretary-General

Enclosure: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on ISO 26000 Systematic review



# ISO 26000

## Social responsibility Systematic review FAQ

### What is a systematic review?

A systematic review is a process that takes place for the maintenance of ISO standards after a given timeframe. In ISO, every International Standard or other deliverable that is published is subject to a systematic review to determine if the standard should be:

- Confirmed
- Revised/amended
- Converted<sup>1</sup> into another form of deliverable, or
- Withdrawn.

The table below provides an overview of the typical timing involved for the systematic review of different deliverables. For more detailed information, please consult the [ISO/IEC Directives Part 1 and Consolidated ISO Supplement, Clause 2.9.1](#).

### What is the process and purpose for a systematic review?

The systematic review is a process that lasts 5 months and is administered electronically by the ISO Central Secretariat. All ISO member bodies are invited to respond to these reviews through a series of questions designed to determine if the standard has been adopted (with or without changes), is being used and whether it relates to any national regulations (see the next question below). Any proposed changes in the standard are to be taken into account by committees to see if the global relevance of the standard could be improved by taking these modifications into account. For additional information on how to interpret the ballot results, please refer to [Clause 2.9.3 of the Directives Part 1](#).

It is important to remember, however, that the final decision to confirm, revise or withdraw a standard remains with the P-members of the responsible committee (when existing).

### Typical timing involved for the systematic review of different deliverables

Deliverable	Max. elapsed time before systematic review	Max. number of times deliverable may be confirmed	Max. life
International Standard	5 years	Not limited	Not limited
Technical Specification (see 3.1.3)	3 years	Once recommended	6 years recommended
Publicly Available Specification (see 3.2.4)	3 years - no default action by ISO Central Secretariat	Once	6 years (If not converted after this period, the deliverable is proposed for withdrawal)
Technical Report (see 3.3.3)	Not specified	Not specified	Not specified

<sup>1</sup> Conversion doesn't apply in this case and is not covered in this FAQ. Please refer to Clause 2.9.3.3 of the ISO/IEC Directives Part 1 and Consolidated ISO Supplement for information on this process.

### How will it work for ISO 26000?

ISO 26000 was developed by a working group which as, since publication, been disbanded. The leadership of the working group, called the **Post Publication Organization (PPO)** was retained to provide support and expertise for users. Normally a systematic review would now take place 5 years after the publication of a standard. However, the ISO 26000 will have a systematic review after 3 years of publication, following the rule in existence at the time of development of this standard and communicated widely.

**IMPORTANT** In the case of the ISO 26000 systematic review, all feedback and comments will be reviewed by the PPO, who will provide a recommendation to the ISO Technical Management Board (TMB) for final decision.

### What questions are asked in a systematic review ballot?

Systematic review ballots ask the following questions:

#### 1. “Recommended action”

Answers: (1) Confirm; (2) Confirm with correction of errors, (3) Revise/amend, (4) Withdraw, (5) Abstain, (6) Abstain with survey replies.

#### 2. “Has the International Standard been adopted or is it intended to be adopted in the future as a national standard or other publication?”

Answers: (1) Yes, (2) No.

#### 3. “Is the national publication identical, or proposed to be identical, to the International Standard or modified?”

Answers: (1) Identical, (2) Modified.

#### 4. “Is this International Standard used in your country without national adoption or are products used in your country based on this standard?”

Answers: (1) Yes, (2) No.

#### 5. “Is this International Standard, or its national adoption, referenced in regulations in your country?”

Answers: (1) Yes, (2) No.

### What happens if a standard is confirmed, revised, amended or withdrawn?

- **Confirmed (retention without technical change):** Where it has been verified that the standard is used, that it should continue to be made available, and that no technical changes are needed, the standard may be confirmed.
- **Amendment/revision (retention with change(s)):** Where it has been verified that the standard is used, that it should be continued to be made available, but that technical changes are needed, a deliverable may be proposed for amendment or revision.

**IMPORTANT** As stated, the PPO would review votes and comments. If the PPO recommends to the TMB that the standard be revised, the TMB will then study the proposal and, if needed, decide on the proper structure to conduct the technical work.

- **Withdrawal:** In the case of the proposed withdrawal of an International Standard, the national bodies shall be informed by the CEO of the decision of the technical committee or subcommittee, with an invitation to inform the office of the CEO within 3 months if they object to that decision. This 3 month period may be extended to 5 months at the request of one or more national bodies. Any objection received shall be referred to the TMB for consideration.

### If I vote for a revision of the standard, can I request a modification of the scope of ISO 26000 such as to become a requirements standard or a Management System Standard (MSS) or both?

No modification to the current scope (Clause 1) of ISO 26000 is possible. Any changes to the scope of the standard will require a new proposal to be drafted.

ISO 26000 was deliberately created without requirements and is not suited to certification. It was also developed in a way that it cannot be considered a MSS. These aspects cannot change, even if the majority of comments express a need for such a change during the systematic review. However, if the majority of voters indicate a need for a requirement MSS based on ISO 26000, or any other modification enlarging the current scope, the PPO will

liaise with ISO Central Secretariat to approach one of the members requesting this change, so that Form 4 (New Work Item Proposal) can be prepared. In case it is a MSS, the proposer would need to provide a Justification Study (JS)<sup>2</sup> detailing further market information on the proposal.

Before submitting the New Work Item Proposal for vote among member bodies, the JS would be submitted to a Management System Standards Task Force (MSS TF), under the TMB, for review. If approved by the MSS TF, the JS would then be circulated together with the Proposal ([Form 4](#)) for a 3 month member body ballot.

## Why is a survey on use of ISO 26000:2010 being issued in parallel with the systematic review?

The systematic review is a brief, automated survey that applies to all deliverables developed in ISO committees. This process aims to determine if a standard can be confirmed or if it needs to be revised or withdrawn. The ISO 26000 survey is a tool that was developed by the PPO expressly for the standard due to its very specific nature and is circulated to ISO Members by the Central Secretariat. This survey has been circulated in November of each year since 2011, and aims to obtain additional information regarding the use and implementation of the standard as well as identify related activities by ISO Members. This year the ISO 26000 survey will be circulated at the end of October rather than in November so that it can coincide with the beginning of the systematic review. Although some questions from the survey may appear identical to those in the systematic review, there is more information requested in the survey that is directly linked to ISO 26000.

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### For more information:

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<sup>2</sup> For the preparation of a Justification Study (JS), please refer to Annex SL (normative) of the ISO/IEC Directives Part 1 and Consolidated ISO Supplement.



## What is ISO 26000?

ISO 26000 is a voluntary guidance standard elaborated by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) on the social responsibility (SR) of organizations. It addresses not only companies, but also all kinds of organizations, regardless of their activity, size and location, as well as governments, regardless of the stage of their country's development.

ISO 26000 is not a Management System Standard and the text of the standard clearly states that *“it is not intended or appropriate for certification purposes or regulatory or contractual use. Any offer to certify, or claims to be certified, to ISO 26000 would be a misrepresentation of the intent and purpose and a misuse of this International Standard. As this International Standard does not contain requirements, any such certification would not be a demonstration of conformity with this International Standard.”*

It is therefore intended to give guidance on organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, community involvement, and development. It aims to provide guidance on integrating social responsibility into an organization.

The IOE was very much involved from the outset in the complex, five-year-long negotiation process which involved business, trade unions, consumers, NGOs, governments and the academic world. ISO 26000 was launched in November 2010. It will be subject to a review in 2013 after a three-year trial period.

## Why is ISO 26000 relevant for Business?

The fact that it was developed through a global consensus process has given ISO 26000 a high profile and attracted significant attention. It is frequently listed together with the ILO Tripartite Declaration, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the UN Global Compact as one of the main international instruments to guide business on social responsibility.

Companies should be aware of ISO 26000 in order to respond to any potential requests from consumers, NGOs or customers.

## What are the main strengths of ISO 26000?

- It reflects broad international consensus on the elements of social responsibility, drawn from authoritative international instruments;
- As such, it serves as a good basis for cross-border discussions on social responsibility;
- It provides good orientation for starting a social responsibility journey;
- It contains a good basis for engaging in stakeholder dialogue and other external discussions;
- It allows for freedom of use: users may draw upon as much or as little of the guidance as necessary to help inform their own social responsibility policies or practices.

## What are the main weaknesses of ISO 26000?

- Unlike most international SR instruments, ISO 26000 is not freely available and must be purchased at a cost of between €50 - €160;
- At 118 pages, ISO 26000 is long, complex and difficult to read;

- Many sections of the guidance are clearly oriented more toward larger organizations and will not be relevant for smaller or medium-sized organizations;
- The guidance tends to dictate actions by the reader rather than to explain the benefits of SR and encourage action by the user; and
- Even though ISO 26000 is explicitly not for certification, it has been misused by many who have offered certification services.

## Misuse of ISO 26000

The misuse of ISO 26000 by consultancies and other bodies offering to “certify” organizations to 26000 is an ongoing problem, with multiple examples over the past two years. Some ISO National Standards Bodies have also created national versions of 26000 that are certifiable, which have created considerable confusion about whether 26000 itself is certifiable. Additionally, many groups within the ISO network continue to push for the development of an ISO certification standard on SR, driven mainly by those with business interests in verification and/or certification services. Against this backdrop of misuse and certification pressure, it is important that companies understand that ISO 26000 is not for certification and that any offer related to certification would be a misuse of the guidance.

## What is the IOE Position on ISO 26000?

The IOE supported the development of guidance on social responsibility. As such, ISO 26000 is an important voluntary guidance document that can provide useful information to organizations thinking about their policies and practices related to social responsibility. Since it has been developed for all types of organizations, the guidance is equally relevant for companies, governments, trade unions and other external stakeholders. However, it is neither a benchmark for an organization’s behavior, nor an authoritative framework. It is up to each company, as well as other organizations, to decide whether and/or how they want to use ISO 26000 within their operations.

But the IOE does not support the development of a certification standard on social responsibility, which is too complex and multi-faceted to be compressed into a single, harmonised and binding standard. Moreover, the most “socially responsible” action in any given situation will depend entirely on the specific context and circumstances of that situation: the right action in one situation may be wrong in another. Such a standard would be an obstacle to companies gearing their activities to the specific needs of their stakeholders, would act as a break on the further development of SR and create red tape and costs for business through certification pressure.

## How does IOE work on ISO 26000 advance the Agenda for Business?

- The IOE very actively engaged in the whole process, achieved some considerable improvements in the text and was able to ensure that ISO 26000 be solely a guidance document.
- The IOE continues to work against the misuse of ISO 26000.
- The IOE provides members and companies with information about ISO 26000 and promotes the exchange of CSR experiences through its Working Group.

## For more Information and Answers to your Questions

Please visit the CSR section of our website [www.ioe-emp.org](http://www.ioe-emp.org). If you do not find what you are looking for, please contact [Matthias Thorns](mailto:thorns@ioe-emp.org) (thorns@ioe-emp.org / +41 22 929 00 21) or [Amelia Espejo](mailto:espejo@ieo-emp.org) (espejo@ieo-emp.org / +41 22 929 00 19).