

IEEE Adherence to the World Trade Organization Principles for International Standardization

Approved by IEEE Board of Directors November 19, 2023

The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) is a central defining document of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Designed to ensure that WTO Members' technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessment procedures do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade, the TBT Agreement additionally recognizes the important role of non-governmental standards organizations in setting national and international standards, and in certifying compliance with such standards.

The TBT Agreement encourages the use of "international standards" in order to reduce trade barriers. Requests for clarification of what is meant by "international standards" led the WTO to respond in G/TBT/9 (Second Triennial Review of the Operation and Implementation of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade): "In order to improve the quality of international standards and to ensure the effective application of the Agreement, the Committee agreed that there was a need to develop principles concerning transparency, openness, impartiality and consensus, relevance and effectiveness, coherence and developing country interests that would clarify and strengthen the concept of international standards under the Agreement and contribute to the advancement of its objectives."

The WTO's TBT Committee adopted a Decision on Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations, which should be followed when developing international standards. The IEEE standards development principles and processes align with the principles articulated in that decision and therefore IEEE is confirmed as a body that develops international standards.

IEEE, a non-governmental organization, and a key leader in developing market relevant international standards, adheres to and supports the principles and requirements of the TBT Agreement. In particular, IEEE operates in active agreement with the WTO.

principle that standards should not create unnecessary obstacles to trade, and whenever appropriate, should specify requirements in terms of performance rather than design or descriptive characteristics.

IEEE's adherence to the six principles of the TBT Committee's Decision on International Standards is illustrated in the following dimensions:

Transparency: All essential information regarding work programmes, as well as on proposals for standards, guides and recommendations under consideration and on the final results should be made easily accessible to at least all interested parties in the territories of at least all WTO members.

IEEE maintains current information on all of its standards projects on a public digital platform that allows access for all parties to view information on projects and topics of interest, including such information as the scope and purpose of a proposed standard, and leadership contact information. Access is granted through an IEEE Web Account, which is freely available to any individual from the IEEE website. All initial drafts of IEEE standards are published and made available from the IEEE website for a sixty day public review period during the development process

Openness: Membership of an international standardizing body should be open on a non-discriminatory basis to relevant bodies of at least all WTO Members. This would include openness without discrimination with respect to the participation at the policy development level and at every stage of standards development.

Standardization in IEEE takes place under the auspices of the IEEE Standards Association. Membership in the IEEE Standards Association is open to all parties, independent of their nationality. The IEEE Standards Association ensures that all members and other stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to participate in the IEEE standards development process as well as in the governance of that process. As stated in the [IEEE Policy on Nondiscrimination](#), "IEEE is committed to the principle that all persons shall have equal access to programs, facilities, services, and employment without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by IEEE policy and/or applicable laws."

Impartiality and Consensus: All relevant bodies of WTO Members should be provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to the elaboration of an international standard so that the standard development process will not give privilege to, or favour the interests of, a particular supplier/s, country/ies or region/s. Consensus procedures should be established that take into account the views of all parties concerned and to reconcile any conflicting arguments.

The approval and publication of an IEEE standard confirms that this work product represents a consensus of the parties who have participated in its development and review. Every balloted, approved, and published standard must attain a technical approval of at least 75 percent of all votes submitted. IEEE's requirements for achieving consensus require that all views and objections be considered, including those of the minority, and that a concerted effort be made toward resolution of any and all documented concerns. A formal appeals process is available to address technical and procedural disputes. Impartiality is ensured as participants in the balloting process are required to declare their affiliations and to classify themselves according to the interests they represent. Balance is achieved by not permitting any single interest category to comprise one-third (1/3) or more of the final balloting group. Each standard is reviewed by the IEEE Standards Association Standards Board prior to approval to ensure that all requirements have been met.

Effectiveness and Relevance: In order to serve the interests of the WTO membership in facilitating international trade and preventing unnecessary trade barriers, international standards need to be relevant and to effectively respond to regulatory and market needs, as well as scientific and technological developments in various countries. They should not distort the global market, have adverse effects on fair competition, or stifle innovation and technological development. In addition, they should not give preference to the characteristics or requirements of specific countries or regions when different needs or interests exist in other countries or regions.

IEEE makes all possible efforts to ensure that its standards meet market needs and take into account the most advanced scientific and technological developments. IEEE standards are reviewed regularly to ensure that they have remained technically relevant; and they may be revised as often as deemed appropriate by technical experts in accordance with market and technology trends. In order to facilitate trade and ensure that standards do not give preference to the characteristics or requirements of specific countries or regions and are not used as barriers to market access, IEEE supports and encourages global collaboration, development, and adoption of standards in partnership with industry, governments, and the public. IEEE standards are developed by a broad group of technology experts, drawn from its 160-plus country membership base and from interested parties outside its membership, resulting in globally accepted and used technical standards.

Coherence: In order to avoid the development of conflicting international standards, it is important that international standardizing bodies avoid duplication of, or overlap with, the work of other international standardizing bodies. In this respect, cooperation and coordination with other relevant international bodies is essential.

IEEE coordinates with industry, governments, associations, and numerous other organizations in the development of standards. In addition to publishing its work program on its website, this is accomplished through established liaisons with organizations, cross pollination of membership, joint standards development and adoption agreements, and a strategic preference for global technical collaboration. As an example, IEEE regularly shares information about its key projects with other global standards developers as a member of the Global Standards Collaboration.

Development Dimension: Constraints on developing countries, in particular, to effectively participate in standards development, should be taken into consideration in the standards development process.

Anyone in the world can participate in developing IEEE standards, and IEEE makes an effort to reach out to both individuals and organizations in developing countries. IEEE has in place programs and services to better enable individuals and organizations in developing countries to productively participate in the development of IEEE standards and has a discounted membership program for individuals in developing countries that offers substantial savings. In addition, participants in developing countries can engage electronically in the development of IEEE standards by, for example, submitting comments during a formal consensus ballot without necessitating extensive or long-distance travel. Discounted membership fees and electronic participation are just two examples of IEEE's efforts to mitigate constraints on participation from interested stakeholders in developing countries with nascent economies.

About IEEE

IEEE is the world's largest technical professional organization dedicated to advancing technology for the benefit of humanity. IEEE and its members inspire a global community to innovate for a better tomorrow through its highly cited publications, conferences, technology standards, and professional and educational activities. IEEE is the trusted "voice" for engineering, computing, and technology information around the globe.