



Recommendations on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies

Revised Edition

F Creation and Promotion of International Agreements on Conformity Assessment¹

The Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies,

Taking into account that even if regulations and standards are harmonized there is still a risk that technical barriers to trade could arise if different conformity assessment procedures exist;

Bearing in mind that national and regional conformity assessment systems, especially those which are mandatory, may constitute barriers to international trade;

Has agreed to recommend that:

- F.1** UNECE Governments should promote the establishment of agreements on conformity assessment (including 1st, 2nd and 3rd party) when justified by the over-all economic benefits to international trade.
- F.2** UNECE Governments should, when considering conformity assessment, include any procedure used, directly or indirectly, to determine that relevant requirements in technical regulations or standards are fulfilled;
- F.3** UNECE Governments should, with regard to such agreements on conformity assessment, take into account the relevant provisions of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade;
- F.4** UNECE Governments should encourage national bodies to apply appropriate ISO/IEC Guides and International Standards on conformity assessment;
- F.5** UNECE Governments should encourage the establishment and strengthening of contacts between national bodies in different UN member countries responsible for agreements on conformity assessment relevant to international trade, whether directly or through existing international organizations;
- F.6** UNECE Governments should encourage the use of existing international conformity assessment systems and schemes operated by long-standing and recognized international organizations, such as the IEC CA Systems and joint IEC/ITU certification scheme and the multilateral mutual recognition arrangements of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) and the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC), where appropriate;
- F.7** UNECE Governments should apply and encourage application of the following guidelines in promoting agreements on conformity assessment.

¹ Recommendation adopted in 1980, revised in 1988, and in 2016.

Purpose

The main purpose of international agreements on conformity assessment should be the creation of confidence in the conformity assessment results issued from within countries participating in the agreements, with the goal of creating mutually favourable conditions for economic cooperation between these countries. The agreements should also provide market access opportunity for product manufacturers and service providers and, most importantly, provide the end user with confidence and trust in those products and services.

Any party considering joining an international agreement would have to review and accept the terms before they enter into the agreement.

Participation

Parties to an agreement on conformity assessment, possibly in different roles, may be States, groups of States, Governments, national or international organizations. In the latter two cases, these may be governmental or non-governmental.

In the case of governmental bodies, participation should be available to any party. In the case of both governmental and non-governmental agreements, parties must be willing to accept and able to conform to the existing rules and obligations. Concerning the technical and administrative capacity and competence of the conformity assessment bodies of a party seeking participation, e.g. accreditation and peer assessment may be necessary before entry of this party into an agreement on conformity assessment.

Equality of rights, obligations and treatment

The principles of equality of rights and obligations and of equal treatment of all products and services covered by the agreement (and satisfying its CA requirements), whether imported or domestic, should be reflected in the agreement.

Availability of information

Agreements on conformity assessment should be published in full. Names and addresses of participating bodies, as well as other relevant information about their activities, should be made readily available.

Mutual recognition

The first goal of a bilateral mutual recognition agreement on assessment of conformity should be the mutual recognition of conformity assessment results carried out in the exporting country in accordance with the requirements of the importing country, for determining conformity with standards or technical regulations. Such agreements can constitute a first step towards a harmonized conformity assessment system for the parties to the agreement.

The first goal of a multilateral mutual recognition agreement on assessment of conformity should be the mutual recognition of conformity assessment results carried out in any participating country in accordance with the requirements of the importing country, for determining conformity with standards or technical regulations. Such agreements require confidence between the parties to the agreement which should be built on a harmonized conformity assessment system between the parties.

In agreements on conformity assessment, parties should be aware of liability concerns, and may be required to be insured against possible liability arising from their operations.

Harmonization of standards and technical regulations

Agreements on conformity assessment should preferably be based on international standards where they exist or as an alternative on harmonized national standards, technical regulations or regional standards. These standards and regulations should have market acceptance.

Consultations and complaints procedure

Provisions should be made for informal consultations in the first place between the interested parties and, in cases where these do not resolve difficulties, for a formal complaint procedure. The latter procedure should, when applicable, be initiated within the international organization or other body agreed upon by the parties to the agreement.

Mutual confidence

Mutual confidence in the technical competence, reliability and impartiality of the relevant national bodies and systems is a prerequisite for the effective functioning of an agreement on conformity assessment. A basis for mutual confidence may be promoted by implementing the procedures presented in the appropriate ISO/IEC International Standards on conformity assessment.

Parties seeking participation in a multilateral mutual recognition agreement should be assessed for acceptance to the agreement through a harmonized process.

Parties participating in a multilateral mutual recognition agreement should be required to consistently apply harmonized conformity assessment processes.

Parties participating in a multilateral mutual recognition agreement should be required to consistently apply a harmonized approach for application of standards to which the conformity assessment processes are being applied.