

ANEC Position Paper

Standardisation and Corporate Social Responsibility

This position paper outlines the requirements and recommendations as identified by ANEC with respect to the desirability and feasibility of standards on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Both at national and international level, initiatives exist related to CSR and standardisation. In some countries, the national standards body embarked on elaborating a national CSR standard, whilst the Consumer Policy Committee of ISO (ISO COPOLCO) recommended to ISO Council to explore the feasibility and desirability of a Management System Standard (MSS) in line with ISO 9000/ISO 14001 on CSR. In addition, at European level, a Multi-stakeholder Forum was set up to improve knowledge about the relationship between CSR and sustainable development.

ANEC, the European consumer voice in standardisation, was established in 1995 to defend the consumer interest in the process of standardisation and certification. ANEC provides expertise based on a network of more than 200 consumer representatives across Europe. ANEC experts directly contribute to the work of more than 60 Technical Committees, Working Groups and New Deliverables of the European Standards Bodies. Areas of priority are: child safety, design for all, domestic appliances, environment, information society, services and traffic safety. ANEC represents consumers from the EU Member States and EFTA countries.

Recommendations

Substantive minimum requirements

Considering the experience with and the impact of Environmental Management System Standards (EMS standards) in general, and ISO 14001 in particular, ANEC sees major limitations of the concept of MSSs¹ and therefore finds that substantive minimum requirements have to be set.

Hence, ANEC considers it indispensable to fulfil and respect the following criteria as a precondition for launching an international standardisation project on CSR:

- Clear-cut minimum performance requirements based on the ILO conventions taking into account existing guidelines such as SA 8000 standard;
- Accountable and verifiable requirements;
- Including reporting requirements (benchmarking against best practices).

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For more see: ANEC/EEB Position Paper on Environmental Management System Standards (ANEC2003/ENV/008).

Verification and certification

ANEC finds that verification and the involvement of concerned stakeholders in this are crucial factors for the credibility of any approach to CSR. ANEC does not consider traditional third party certification as appropriate to meet this end. Therefore, ANEC calls for a:

new method of independent third-party certification, involving concerned stakeholders (in particular employees and local initiatives concerned with social and/or environmental issues) that can ensure the validity of company claims.

Scope

Responsible corporate behaviour covers a broad range of issues including economic, occupational health, environmental and social aspects. Whilst it is, of course, desirable to have a set of rules covering all dimensions of corporate activities it may be difficult to establish such rules in practice. Hence, it may be preferable to set standards/regulations for the various subject areas separately and combine them at a later stage.

Reform of the international standardisation system

Certainly, standards related to CSR have a global dimension. In general, ANEC is convinced that International Standards Bodies have to comply with the principles of openness, transparency, balanced representation and full stakeholder participation. However, representation of consumers and other public interest advocates is marginal within the standardisation bodies. Business interests dominate ISO committees, even more than in Europe. Therefore ANEC calls for a reform of the international standardisation system based on the following criteria:

- Measures seeking to establish a balance of social interests;
- Complementing national representation of consumer interests and other NGO interests by regional and international organisations and establishing a status equivalent to the one of Associate Members in CEN, ensure that the positions of these organisations are taken into account;
- Establishment of a funding mechanism for consumer participation;
- Establishment of a conflict resolution mechanism open to stakeholder organisations;
- Identifying stakeholder interests in addition to the national positions;
- Identifying TC members/participants according to interest groups;
- Public access to draft standards in order to ensure input from all stakeholders, in other terms commitment to consult stakeholders who have not been represented in the TC itself, for instance in writing;
- Establishment of an internal mechanism to monitor the implementation of the above mentioned measures.

Legal Measures

CSR is an important issue that covers all industry sectors in every country: However, CSR cannot be left to industry self-regulation and cannot rely on voluntary standards only. Progress in this field is unlikely without clear-cut binding legal obligations. Hence, ANEC calls for the implementation of European regulation on CSR including minimum performance and

reporting requirements based on an independent verification system, which is external and not imposed by industry.

Conclusions

Consumer demands are for clear benchmarks and requirements in the area of CSR and any standard needs to reflect these needs. Having said this, ANEC recommends and considers it indispensable to apply the following criteria in legislation or standardisation activities related to CSR:

- Definition of common understanding of CSR;
- Clear-cut minimum requirements that are accountable and verifiable, including requirements for reporting and performance;
- Minimum requirements based on ILO conventions and existing guidelines such as SA 8000 standard;
- Independent verification against these requirements based on a new method of third party certification involving concerned stakeholders;
- Revision of structure and procedures of international standards bodies to ensure adequate influence of organisations representing the public interest.