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Brussels, 1 July 2020

SMEs oppose proposal to create a new ISO committee on social responsibility

Brussels, 1 July 2020 - Small Business Standards (SBS), the association representing European SMEs in standardisation, opposes the proposal to create a new ISO Technical Committee on social responsibility. The proposal is under vote by the ISO members until 15 July 2020. SMEs do not see the need to revise ISO 26000 and are concerned the current proposal would not help to advance social responsibility. They are concerned it would just create unhelpful burdens for companies, especially if accompanied with requirements for certification.

At the end of April 2020, the French national standards body (AFNOR) submitted a proposal to ISO to create a new Technical Committee on social responsibility. Besides the creation of a new Committee, it is proposed to revise the existing ISO 26000 standard to develop implementation guidelines for different types of organisations, and additional standards on specific social responsibility issues.

Yesterday, SBS published its comments on the proposal. According to SBS, the principles of social responsibility have not changed since the adoption of the standard. ISO 26000 is already covering the main principles of social responsibility including sustainability aspects. Therefore, there is no need to revise it.

The comments also question the need to develop multiple standards under the ISO 26000 series. It is doubtful whether the creation of additional documents would help to advance social responsibility. This may just add unnecessary burdens on SMEs, especially if accompanied by the creation of certification schemes. The value of ISO 26000 2010 is precisely that it is written to be easily applicable by all types of organizations and does not include specific requirements but guidance, which is not intended as the basis for certification. The standard explains the different concepts and allows every organization to assess its unique situation and take its own strategic approach in relation to social responsibility. It is important that these principles are kept should it finally be decided to go ahead with a revision of the standard. SMEs are concerned the current proposal would lead to the development of various documents including requirements for certification.

If it is finally decided to revise the standard and create a new Committee, SBS stresses the importance of putting in place a mechanism to ensure a balanced representation of the different stakeholders. SMEs, which account for the majority of businesses worldwide, should be recognized as an essential stakeholder in any future work in this area.

Useful link:

SBS position on the proposal for a new ISO committee on social responsibility: https://www.sbs-sme.eu/sites/default/files/publications/SBS%20Position%20ISO%2026000_FINAL.pdf

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EDITORS' NOTES: Small Business Standards (SBS) is the association representing European SMEs in standardisation. SBS is co-financed by the European Commission and EFTA. Its 24 members are national and European sectoral and inter-professional associations representing SMEs in 32 European countries.

Further information: Maitane Olabarria Uzquiano, Director, m.olabarria@sbs-sme.eu
Press contact: Tessa Delville, Communication Officer, +32 (0)2 285 07 04, pressoffice@sbs-sme.eu

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