

Article 6 of EU Regulation 1025/2012 Annual Report 2021

SMEs using Standards

SMEs and entrepreneurship are central to Ireland's challenge of generating a broad-based growth and prosperity that builds on and extends its successes in attracting high quality foreign direct investment.

There were approximately 250,000 active enterprises in Ireland in 2016, virtually all of them SMEs. Some 92% of enterprises had less than 10 employees (micro), 6.8% had between 10-49 employees (small), 1.2% had 50-249 employees (medium), and only 0.2% had 250 or more employees (large). The share of micro-enterprises is slightly above the OECD average and the share of medium-sized firms somewhat lower than the OECD average. Furthermore, SMEs account for as much as 56% of manufacturing employment and 74% of services employment in Ireland, roughly in line with the OECD averages.

Alongside this substantial SME activity, Ireland has a strong concentration of large firms in capital-intensive and globalised activities, such as manufacturing of computers or pharmaceuticals, as well as in international financial services and software development.

The OECD identified that integrating international Standards adherence in SME development programmes, among other measures, could assist in increasing SME productivity by upgrading to international best practice business management approaches.

Increased SME adoption of international Standards could support productivity growth. Compliance with industry standards could help SMEs to increase quality, win contracts with foreign-owned multinationals, engage in e-commerce and develop their intellectual assets and innovation. However, there seems to be a lack of awareness among SMEs of the benefits of standards. The adoption of standards could improve internal processes, enable outsourcing, enhance collaboration with suppliers and clients, and facilitate scaling up, exporting, and climbing up global value chains.

Standards + Innovation

Almost 60% of Irish SMEs engage in innovation activities but only 6% trade internationally. The adoption, use and compliance with industry standards could help SMEs to increase quality, win contracts with foreign-owned multinationals, engage in e-commerce and develop their intellectual assets and [innovation](#). However, there seems to be a lack of awareness among SMEs of the benefits of Standards. NSAI has collaborated with skills providers to build innovation excellence programmes, with a focus on SMEs, using the newly published International Standard ISO 56002 for [Innovation Management System](#) as the framework for the course. NSAI is working at increasing policy attention to the role that adopting and developing international standards can play in enhancing SME productivity which may incorporate standards adherence in company SME

programmes and enhanced treatment of Standards in management development programmes.

NSAI SME Portal

In relation to Management System Standards, the [NSAI SME Portal](#), gives advice to SMEs on how adopt and put into practice the international best practice business management approaches without the requirement to get certified. The Practical Guides for SMEs are made available with additional information.

NSAI also offers a Standards Health-Check to Irish companies where NSAI will review the list of technical standards used by a company and provide updates on any changes to the standards free of charge.

SMEs and Standardisation

Standardisation is the activity of drafting, developing and agreeing the content of a Standard. NSAI maintains over 400 indigenous Irish Standards. NSAI adopts all European Standards (EN) and publishes approximately 1,100 Irish Standard adoptions annually.

Indigenous Irish Standards are developed and maintained with a focus on supporting Irish SMEs.

52% of the Industry representative membership of NSAI Standards Committees developing Standards are from Irish Medium, Small and Micro enterprises.

As Ireland's National Standards Body, NSAI provides access to its Irish (domiciled in Ireland) members directly and indirectly into the standardisation processes of national standardisation within [NSAI](#), [CEN](#), [Cenelec](#), [ISO](#) and [IEC](#).

NSAI has established 50 technical committees dealing with the following sectors of interest to Irish businesses:

- Accessibility,
- Building & Construction,
- Biotechnology
- Chemicals, Chemical Engineering & Food Products,
- Electrical Engineering,
- Electronic Engineering,
- Energy supply and distribution,
- Fundamental Measurement, Information and Communications Technology.
- Health, Cosmetics and Medical Equipment,
- Management Systems,
- Mechanical Engineering,
- Metallic and Non-Metallic Materials,
- Products for Household & Leisure Use,
- Transport, Mechanical, Handling & Packaging, and
- Services.

Awareness and Promotion Initiatives

In order to promote the use of standards and provide greater access to the standardisation development process NSAI has developed an awareness strategy focused on key stakeholders and invested in ICT solutions where possible so as to facilitate those already engaged and to grow the number of participants from small and medium size businesses, and the research and innovation communities. A dedicated web page for SMEs, the [NSAI SME Portal](#), provides information about aspects of NSAI's standardisation work including the annual work programme and an open invitation to get involved in activities through participating in NSAI's Standards Committees. Membership of committees is open to all those with relevant interest without charge. The online [NSAI SME Portal](#) also provides information to SMEs on the ISO Management System standards highlighting the Practical Guides for Small Enterprises.

Launched in 2011 with the support of the Irish Small and Medium Enterprises Association (ISME) and the Small Firms Association (SFA), NSAI's online Enquiry Portal '[Your Standards, Your Say](#)' makes it easy for small and medium sized enterprises to engage in standardisation activities. This facility makes vital information on Standards in development easily accessible and gives business and the public a chance to have their say on standards prior to them being finalised. A programme was put in place to significantly upgrade this facility and make it more user friendly.

Through their work NSAI Standards Officers develop national stakeholder networks and provide information on Standards development and the benefits of participation in relevant areas including the advantages that can accrued to businesses such as enhancing their competitiveness and creating the condition to be first in line to take advantage when market opportunities present.

Standards sales are web-based making it easy for businesses to search and purchase standards online. Abstracts of standards are available to view without charge for the Irish [Standards catalogue](#). The pricing structure is competitive with tariff options for purchase of multiple Standards. In addition, a tailoring update service is available where businesses can, by payment of an annual charge, receive updates on standard revisions for view or automatic purchase.

All Irish Standards can be viewed without charge by visiting our Head Office during working hours. In addition, the NSAI catalogue has also been made available through most of the University and Institute of Technology libraries in Ireland.

Annually, NSAI hosts and participates in a number of business and government sponsored events. The levels of involvement ranged from hosting and providing speakers to providing an information desk supplying brochures and answering questions relating to standards and standardisation activities.

NSAI has an ongoing media campaign on national radio and online social media highlighting the benefits of industry participation in standardization and advocated the use of certification to standards.

NSAI uses a number of IT tools and social media to promote standards. These include RSS feeds on the website which allow users to sign up to follow NSAI news and events; circulation of a quarterly e-zine to 14,000 registered interests; using the NSAI social media to disseminate information on NSAI activities.

NSAI participates in the CEN/CENELEC SME Working Group which focuses on the standardisation needs of SMEs.

NSAI operates an SME focused helpdesk where SMEs can address standards related queries directly to an NSAI staff member.