

European Commission
Public consultation on the future of the Internal Market

Q11. Do you think that voluntary standards for services would be beneficial? If so, in which sectors should they be introduced?

Whilst ANEC, in general, supports the decision to introduce voluntary standards in the services sector, there are several issues which need to be addressed and taken into account before significant further standardisation in the field of services should take place.

First, ANEC believes that the services sector is too important in terms of the safety, health and economic security of consumers for it to be left solely to voluntary standards or self-regulation. Standards should not be seen as a replacement for legislation, but, rather, as a complementary tool. For this reason, ANEC calls for a horizontal legal framework to be set up at the European level. Such a framework should address the general safety of services (e.g. through a 'General Services Safety Directive'), the liability of services providers (analogous to the product liability legislation already in place in the EU), as well as existing gaps in consumer protection legislation. Once in place, the legal framework could then be underpinned by formal standardisation to address the detailed specifications and guidelines.

Second, as the European Commission is intending to extend the New Approach, which was developed for product safety in the 1980s, to services, ANEC calls for the rules and rights of public stakeholder participation to be enforced to ensure fair and equal chances for all stakeholders. The European standardisation system should be reviewed to ensure that it is equipped to cope with these future tasks.

Third, ANEC supports the setting up of proper market surveillance mechanisms and stricter enforcement of legislation in order to ensure industry compliance with the relevant legislation and standards. It is only through such measures that standards have real value to the European consumer.

Finally, once proper European legislation, whether horizontal or specific, has been put in place to give voluntary standards a framework under which to be drafted, ANEC would support such standards to be developed in sectors which have a direct impact on the health and safety, as well as the economic security, of European consumers. Services provided cross-border are of particular importance as a growing number of consumers buy services from another Member State. For these reasons, ANEC would prioritise sectors such as tourism, transport, leisure and sports services, repair services, tool hire services, maintenance and installation services, health/beauty services, financial services and residential services.



It should be noted that the main issues of relevance to consumers in service standards will be identified and assessed in an up-coming ANEC study on the core consumer elements and their minimum requirements in services standards, to be carried out in 2006.

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