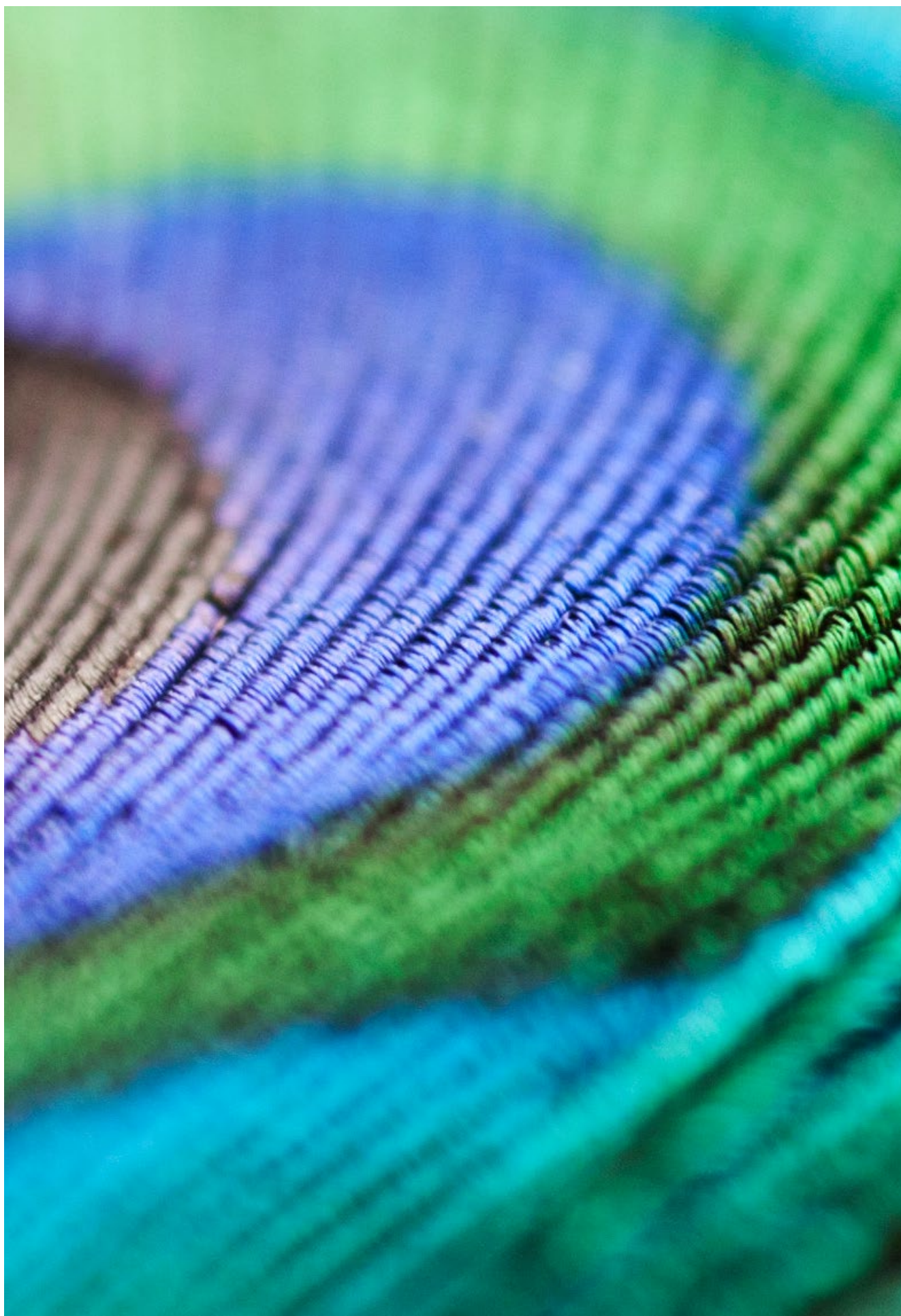# ISO policy brief:
# A primer on public policy

Maximizing your NSB's engagement
with policymakers

# Contents

# Glossary of abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Definition |
|---|---|
| CA | Conformity assessment |
| CAB | Conformity assessment body |
| GRP | Good regulatory practice |
| GSP | Good standardization practice |
| IEC | International Electrotechnical Commission |
| ISO | International Organization for Standardization |
| ISO/CASCO | ISO Committee for conformity assessment |
| NQP | National quality policy |
| NSBs | National standards bodies |
| NSS | National standardization strategy |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| QI | Quality infrastructure |
| SDGs | UN Sustainable Development Goals |
| TBT | Technical barriers to trade |
| TC | Technical committee |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNECE | United Nations Economic Commission for Europe |
| UNIDO | United Nations Industrial Development Organization |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

# Executive summary

*Effective public policies are essential for governments **to meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens and to ensure the orderly functioning of society**. Policymakers are often required to address a complex mix of real and/or perceived opportunities, problems and associated challenges. They also need to ensure that their intended policy choices minimize any potential unintended consequences for those who may be impacted.*

International Standards can play a significant role in helping achieve public policy objectives across various domains, including those developed or strengthened with the aim of achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development[1]. These standards provide guidelines and harmonized best practices that ensure consistency and promote cooperation among countries and stakeholders. International Standards respond to market needs and are informed by global expert opinion through a multi-stakeholder consensus-based process. Such standards represent a wide range of views and expertise, including those relating to social and economic interests.

Effective policy design often requires a deep understanding of the target audience and the potential impacts of the instruments chosen for implementation. Other factors influencing the selection of instruments depend on the policy goals, context, available resources, and the desired level of government intervention. Effective policy implementation often involves a combination of instruments to address complex and multifaceted challenges.

Public policies can, and do, vary significantly between countries and regions based on cultural, political, economic and other factors. Even with this consideration in mind, policymakers can still rely on ISO standards for internationally harmonized solutions. ISO members represent most countries. Member concerns related to a particular issue are assessed by all members in the ISO system. This may result in the development of a standard or revision of an existing standard to address that issue. Moreover, ISO standards are also systematically reviewed and improved by the various technical committees. This means they provide up-to-date solutions and specifications.

ISO has a catalogue of over 24 000 International Standards that are available as a trusted resource to expedite the development and implementation of national policies and strategies. The inclusive approach used in the development of ISO standards ensures a robust technical foundation that governments can leverage to attain their policy objectives.

The responsibility for the implementation of public policy typically falls upon various government agencies, departments and organizations within a given jurisdiction, including, in some cases, the national standards bodies (NSBs). Apart from encouraging the policymakers or regulators to refer to standards in their regulations, the NSB could also provide guidance to regulators on the conformity assessment (CA) tools to be used to ensure the right monitoring mechanism.

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1   The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, also contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Standards, in support of public policy initiatives and appropriate technical regulations, can support attainment of these SDGs by defining requirements, best-practice guidelines and other criteria for a whole range of topics. Further information on the SDGs can be found at https://sdgs.un.org/goals.

To help ISO members engage more effectively and establish strong partnerships with policymakers and regulators, and thereby put International Standards on the policy agenda, the ISO Central Secretariat has launched a dedicated programme on Standards and Public Policy in September 2023. It aims to equip NSBs with the knowledge and tools, as well as provide support, to engage more effectively with policymakers and regulators by leveraging International Standards, including conformity assessment standards, as an additional tool to achieve policy objectives across various sectors. The first flagship deliverable of this programme is the *ISO Standards and Public Policy: A toolkit for National Standards Bodies*[2], which sets the framework. Building on this, we have designed a comprehensive programme of action to increase collaboration between NSBs, policymakers and regulators, sector by sector. It includes workshops, thematic policy briefs, research initiatives, peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing and capacity-building training. The ultimate goal is to establish a vibrant global community of interest that uses International Standards to achieve public policy objectives, foster trade, and promote international regulatory cooperation.

Within the framework of this programme, the ISO Central Secretariat has developed the *ISO policy brief: A primer on public policy – Maximizing your NSB's engagement with policymakers*. It provides a broader perspective and guidance to its members on how public policies are developed and implemented, the variety of tools available to policymakers, where standards can assist and the role of NSBs in supporting public policy. The need for proactive engagement between NSBs and policymakers cannot be overstated. This brief is intended to serve as a complement to the aforementioned Toolkit and as an "umbrella" document to a series of thematic policy briefs that are being developed for ISO members (especially developing countries) to use, together with this document, to strengthen their engagement with policymakers.

2   Available at https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100476.html

# Acknowledgements

## Disclaimer

# 1. What is public policy?

According to the OECD, public policy is defined as "a consistent course of action designed to meet a goal or objective, respond to an issue or problem identified by the government as requiring action or reform"[3].

3   See https://www.oecd.org/gov/a-to-z-public-governance.htm#:~:text=a%20line%20ministry.-,Policy,as%20requiring%20action%20or%20reform.

Public policies are created to achieve certain objectives, such as promoting economic growth, ensuring public safety, protecting the environment, addressing social inequalities, providing public services, and enhancing the overall well-being of the population. They are usually designed to influence and guide the behaviour of individuals, organizations and institutions within a specific jurisdiction[4].

Public policy is a statement of intent by government or other state actors to give effect to a set of policy objectives that aim to resolve problems or address various needs within society[5], including to meet regional and international commitments such as the UN 2030 Agenda. Some policies are designed to bring about change, whilst others seek to respond to change. Public policies can be wide-ranging and cover various areas, including:

- **Trade policy:** These policies address issues related to international trade practices, or imports and exports, with the aim of promoting economic goals while appropriately protecting the interests of the country's industries, workers and consumers.

- **Environmental policy:** These policies aim to manage natural resources, combat climate change and regulate pollution to protect the environment.

- **Health policy:** These policies deal with healthcare access, regulation of medical services and public health initiatives.

- **Transportation and mobility policy:** These policies focus on infrastructure development, transportation systems and regulations related to transportation modes.

- **Energy policy:** These policies involve decisions about energy production, distribution, consumption and sustainability.

- **Digital policy:** These policies aim to manage, grow, govern and build trust in the digital economy and use of new technologies, combat cyber threats, protect national security, people and organizations and regulate new technology.

**Box 1:**

The ISO publication on Good Standardization Practices[6] notes that "the Quality Infrastructure (QI) can provide effective and efficient services to the country as a complete system only if its elements are established and maintained with clear mandates, seamless interfaces without costly overlaps, and international recognition. The same document highlights the fact that a National Quality Policy (NQP) is a best-practice document that addresses QI related needs within a framework of other policies, e.g. industrial policy, export policy, and environmental policy. The NQP encourages the use of international best practice, ensures QI functions are not duplicated, and that they are focused on cost effectively meeting sector driven needs.

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4  See also *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 2, p. 13.
5  For a more detailed explanation regarding the complexities of defining public policy, see for example Cairney (2020), p. 18; Hill & Varone (2021), p. 20; Hughes (2003), p. 114; Shafritz and Russell (2005), p. 42.
6  See ISO Publication on Good Standardization Practices, page 98. Available at https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100440.html

Public policies can, and do, vary significantly between countries and regions based on cultural, political economic and other factors. Effective public policies are essential for governments to meet the needs and aspirations of their citizens and to ensure the orderly functioning of society. Governments also need to consider their commitments to fulfilling international agreements to which they are parties. Members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), for instance, are required to ensure that their trade policies are suitably aligned with the provisions of the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement).

Articles 2.4 and 5.4 of the Agreement note that "members shall use relevant international standards as a basis for technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures, except when ineffective or inappropriate for policy objectives".

Article 2.5 states that " Whenever a technical regulation is prepared, adopted or applied for one of the legitimate objectives explicitly mentioned in paragraph 2, and is in accordance with relevant international standards, it shall be rebuttably presumed not to create an unnecessary obstacle to international trade". These clauses aim at establishing transparency between members through the use of International Standards as a common reference when establishing mandatory requirements on products, thereby enabling international regulatory cooperation. The development of public policy should therefore be designed to align with the relevant requirements of the TBT and other relevant international agreements. The development of public policy can also benefit immensely from the considered use of the ever-expanding catalogue of International Standards, currently over 24 000, for these and other policy areas, published by ISO as part of achieving such alignment.

# 2. How are public policies developed?

Policymakers are often required to address a complex mix of real and/or perceived problems and associated challenges. They need to decide whether the "problem" requires government action, or not, and if so, to what extent. Policymakers also need to ensure that their intended policy choices minimize any potential unintended consequences for those who may be impacted.
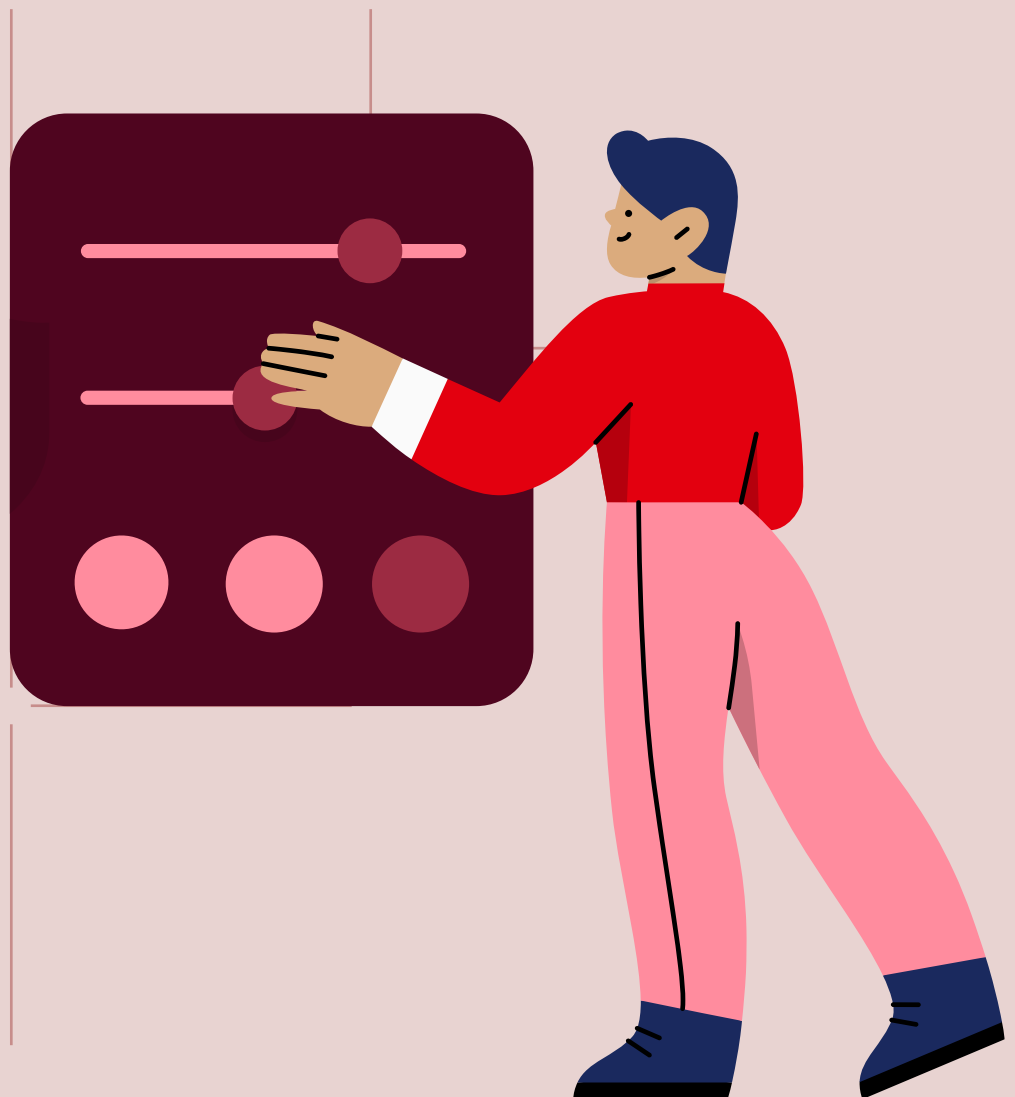
The development of public policies therefore normally involves a multi-step process that combines research, analysis, stakeholder engagement, decision making, implementation, and evaluation[7].

While the specific steps can vary from country to country[8], and will also depend on the context and complexity of the issue at hand, the generic steps outlined below are often followed[9] as public policies are developed:

- **Problem identification and agenda setting:** The process begins with the identification of a societal issue or problem that requires government intervention. This can arise from various sources, such as public concerns, expert analysis or changing circumstances. Once the nature of the problem has been defined, decisions need to be made on which issues deserve to be recognized as a priority.

- **Policy analysis:** In this phase, extensive research and analysis are conducted to understand the nature, causes and consequences of the problem. This involves collecting data, reviewing relevant literature and assessing potential policy options. The aim is to generate evidence-based insights that inform the decision-making process.

- **Policy formulation:** Based on the analysis, policymakers, and others with the requisite expertise, develop a range of potential policy options to address the identified problem. These options may involve the use of different policy instruments, like the creation of draft legislation and regulation proposals. Each option is evaluated in terms of its feasibility, effectiveness, costs and potential impacts.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** Consultation and engagement with various stakeholders, including interest groups, advocacy organizations, affected communities, experts and the public, are required to gauge the level of support for the chosen policy instrument.

- **Decision making:** After assessing the policy options and gathering input, policymakers make a decision about which policy approach to pursue. This decision can be influenced by political considerations, available resources, public sentiment, and expert recommendations.

- **Implementation:** Once a policy option is selected, a plan for implementation is developed. This includes assigning responsibilities to a relevant organization and ensuring it has the necessary resources (i.e. staffing, budget and legal authority) to ensure effective execution. This may involve allocating resources, creating specific regulations and establishing administrative structures to put the policy into practice.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** As the policy is implemented, ongoing monitoring and evaluation take place to assess if the policy was appropriate, implemented correctly and had the desired impact.

- **Policy adjustment:** If the monitoring and evaluation process reveal shortcomings or unintended consequences, policymakers may modify or adjust the policy. Such an approach allows for continuous improvement and agility to respond to changing circumstances.

- **Policy termination or continuation:** Policies should be terminated if they are no longer relevant. Alternatively, if a policy proves successful, it may be extended or refined over time.

- **Public communication:** Throughout the policy development process, clear communication with the public and stakeholders is important. Transparency about the objectives, rationale and expected benefits of the policy helps build trust and support.

As previously mentioned, the level of complexity and controversy of a problem may impact the timeline and approach taken in subsequent policy development. The policy development process can also be influenced by political dynamics, budget constraints, public opinion, and the level of urgency associated with the issue.

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7   See also *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 2, p. 13.
8   Hill and Varone (2021), p. 180.
9   For more details, and a diagrammatic representation of the generic policy cycle, see Cairney (2020), p. 26.

# 3. What instruments are used for the implementation of public policies?

The implementation of public policy can be understood as the actions that need to be taken to achieve the desired results and impacts of the policy on the intended target audience. It is a process during which policy outputs (i.e. what the government intends to do to address a particular issue or problem in society) are transformed into policy outcomes[10] (i.e. the actual results and impacts that a policy has on the intended target population). This requires a range of instruments[11] and tools that governments and relevant stakeholders use to put policy objectives into action. These instruments are designed to facilitate the execution, coordination and monitoring of policy initiatives[12].



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10  See for instance Knill and Tosun (2022), p. 126.
11  An explanation of various alternatives to traditional regulation can be found in an OECD Report of the same name at https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/42245468.pdf.
12  More information on good regulatory practice (GRP) can be found in *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 6 (pp. 23-24) and paragraph 7 (pp. 25-26).

Such instruments include:

- **Legislation:** Legislation is one of the fundamental instruments to give effect to policy. Creating, amending or repealing laws is the fundamental way governments exert influence. Laws and regulations set legal requirements, prohibitions (bans), sanctions and obligations that individuals, organizations and government agencies must follow. They provide a framework for enforcing policy goals and maintaining order[13].

- **Regulatory framework:** This includes the setting out of rules and requirements within which regulatory agencies enforce compliance. Regulatory agencies are empowered to create rules and guidelines that govern the behaviour of individuals, businesses and industries. Regulations can be used to ensure safety, environmental protection, consumer rights, and more.

- **Incentives and disincentives:** Taxation, subsidies and grants can be used to encourage individuals and businesses to comply with policy objectives. Governments can use taxes to discourage certain behaviours or to raise revenue. Subsidies can incentivize desired behaviours, such as renewable energy adoption. Such policies encourage individuals to adopt the desired behaviours without it becoming a legal mandate. Disincentives such as fines and penalties discourage unwanted actions.

- **Legal enforcement:** When necessary, legal enforcement mechanisms, such as penalties, sanctions and legal proceedings, are used to ensure compliance with legislation and regulations.

- **Programmes and projects:** These can be used to address policy objectives and outline the steps, activities and resources required to achieve desired outcomes, such as resilient infrastructure projects, energy efficiency-related programmes and public health interventions.

- **Public-private partnerships (PPPs):** Collaboration between government entities and private-sector organizations can support to deliver public services or infrastructure projects and achieve policy objectives. These partnerships leverage private-sector expertise, resources and funding to achieve policy objectives.

- **Information, awareness and communication campaigns:** Inform the public about policy goals, benefits and actions. These campaigns can help influence the desired behaviour change and garner support for the policy initiative.

- **Collaboration and networking:** Partnerships and networks with stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia and international organizations, can enhance policy implementation by leveraging expertise, resources and support.

- **Pilot programmes and demonstrations:** Testing policy interventions on a smaller scale through pilot programmes allows policymakers to assess their feasibility, effectiveness and potential challenges before broader implementation.

Effective policy design often requires a deep understanding of the target audience and the potential impacts of the instruments chosen for implementation. Other factors influencing the selection of instruments depend on the policy goals, the regulatory approach of the government, context, available resources, and the desired level of government intervention. Effective policy implementation often involves a combination of instruments to address complex and multifaceted challenges.

A well-constructed technical committee tasked with shaping a specific standard for a policy goal will typically have these stakeholders involved and engaged from the outset.

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13  The OECD Recommendation on Regulatory Policy and Governance sets out the measures that governments can take to deliver laws and regulations that meet public policy objectives and have a positive impact on the economy and society. See "Adapting rulemaking for an interconnected world" available at https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/international-regulatory-cooperation-policy-brief-2020.pdf.

# 4. Who is responsible for policy implementation?

The responsibility for the implementation of public policy typically falls upon various national and/or local government departments and/or (quasi-) autonomous agencies, within a given jurisdiction[14]. One of the main tasks of regulatory bodies or agencies is to implement public policy in market-related areas such as electricity or water supply. These bodies carry out regulation using their own power, resources and responsibilities[15]. Entities responsible for policy implementation can vary depending on the nature of the policy, the level of government (local, regional, national), and the organizational structure of the government.

14  See Knill and Tosun (p. 123) for a more detailed description on implementation structure.
15  Ditto.

Some key players involved in the implementation of national public policy are:

- **Elected officials** have an important role in ensuring that policies are implemented effectively by advocating for the necessary resources, overseeing implementation and making subsequent adjustments, as required, so that the policy continues to achieve its intended outcomes.

- **Government departments and agencies** are usually the primary entities responsible for implementing public policies. These agencies are tasked with executing the specific actions outlined in the policy plan. In many countries, NSBs are also involved in the implementation of public policy given their roles as standards developers and, in some cases, as conformity assessment bodies (CABs). Civil servants including officials working within government agencies, are responsible for the day-to-day operations of policy implementation. They carry out tasks, coordinate activities, manage resources, and ensure that the policy's objectives are met.

- **Stakeholders** should be engaged and involved in supporting policy initiatives. Depending on the policy's objectives and intended outcomes, it is advisable to promote the active participation from diverse sectors, including businesses, NGOs, community groups and academic institutions, in the execution and endorsement of policy initiatives. Collaborating with such targeted groups can also enhance the effectiveness of the implementation of a policy. It should be noted that international organizations are often involved in providing guidance and technical assistance to governments in their implementation of policies that have cross-border implications, such as international agreements or treaties related to trade, sustainable development, climate change, etc.

Effective policy implementation requires clear communication, coordination, sufficient resources, capable personnel, and a commitment to achieving the policy's intended outcomes. Policymakers also need to ensure that their intended policy choices minimize any potential unintended consequences for those who may be impacted. Other challenges that may arise include resource limitations, bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of coordination and changing political circumstances. Ongoing monitoring, evaluation and adaptability are therefore crucial to ensure successful policy implementation.

# 5. The role of International Standards, national standards bodies and conformity assessment bodies

The ISO publication *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies* highlights the concept of a standard as a guiding document that is "considered as a formula or document that describes the best way of doing something. It could be related to product manufacturing, managing a process, delivering a service or supplying materials – standards cover a huge range of activities"[16].



16  See *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 9, p. 29.

International Standards, as such as those developed by ISO, IEC and ITU, jointly known as the World Standards Cooperation, are global solutions that respond to market needs and are informed by the collective wisdom of global experts through a multi-stakeholder consensus-based process. These standards encompass a broad spectrum of perspectives and expertise, including those related to social, environmental and economic concerns. They serve as guidelines and best harmonized practices to ensure consistency, build trust and facilitate international cooperation among countries and stakeholders.

The value of the ISO system is not solely in the standards development process and governance framework, but also in its extensive global network/ membership comprising 169 national members, each with one voice representing their respective country. All members are welcome to join ISO technical committees (TCs) and contribute to the International Standards development process. Standards emerging from this process carry inherent legitimacy and international buy-in; hence they receive widespread international acceptance as they are based on global needs and are the result of systematic collaboration and consensus among members. As a result, ISO standards have worldwide credibility and, once a consensus-based standard is agreed by the members, it can be adopted globally by all ISO members, either as is or with adjustments to meet the national requirements and/or context. As such, International Standards offer a cost-effective means of sharing and disseminating knowledge across borders, as well as ensuring widespread adoption.

The referencing and application of International Standards in regulation and legislation can significantly enhance the acceptance of policy guidance or legislation. From an international perspective, it can promote regulatory cooperation and can facilitate trade. Therefore, International Standards not only play a vital role in policy implementation, but also have a substantial impact on the development and influence of public policy across various domains.

International Standards impact public policy in areas including:

- **Regulatory frameworks:** The WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) primarily relates to technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures. Standards, which are by definition voluntary in the TBT Agreement[17], also have an important role in its framework[18]. The agreement requires that WTO members use relevant International Standards, whenever available, as a basis for their technical regulations (Article 2.4)[19]. WTO members are also required to use "standards, and relevant guides or recommendations issued by international standardizing bodies where these exist, or their completion is imminent" as a basis for their own conformity assessment procedures (Article 5.4)[20]. International Standards can therefore serve as a basis for creating or refining a regulatory framework at the national and regional levels that are also TBT compliant. Governments may adopt these standards as part of their policies to ensure that their regulations are aligned with global best practices.

ISO and IEC have published a document to inform regulators of the benefits of choosing to use and reference ISO and IEC standards for regulations and to demonstrate that doing so can support good regulatory practice[21]. To summarize, ISO/IEC standards are developed in line with the WTO TBT provisions and principles for standards development[22], meaning that using these standards as the basis of technical regulation and/or conformity assessment procedures presumes no unnecessary obstacles to trade.

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17  The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Annex 1, notes that a standard is a "document approved by a recognized body, that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory".
18  More details regarding the relationship between technical regulations and standards in the context of the WTO TBT Agreement can be found in *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, Box 4, p. 21.
19  See the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Article 2, paragraph 2.4.
20  See the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Article 5, paragraph 5.4.
21  See *Using and referencing ISO and IEC standards for technical regulations*.
22  See WTO TBT – Decision of the Committee on *Principles for the development of International Standards*

- **Trade and commerce:** Research has shown[23] that standards used in importing markets can result in cost increases for exporters because of the need to adapt their products and production processes, as well as the need for retesting and recertification to confirm that the products are meeting the importing market requirements. Where importing market standards are harmonized with International Standards, such as those from ISO, the negative effect on developing country exporters is substantially lessened, or even reversed[24]. Even when there is an initially negative cost-impact of an importing-market standard, over time, firms and governments tend to show substantial ability to adapt and prosper in the new environment, and the standard can be the catalyst for higher productivity and quality[25]. Public policies that promote the adoption of these standards can therefore help foster economic growth[26].

- **Health and safety:** International Standards related to health, safety and quality are essential in areas like food safety, pharmaceuticals, medical devices and workplace safety. Governments can use these standards to formulate regulations that establish best practices, safeguard public health and guarantee the well-being of consumers and workers.

- **Environmental protection:** International Standards can be used to guide the development of policies aimed at conserving natural resources, mitigating climate change and managing pollution. Such standards help countries align their environmental policies using the insights of international experts in addressing environmental challenges.

> **Example 2:**
>
> The British Standards Institution (BSI) works with the UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) to facilitate the uptake of safe, secure and interoperable Energy Smart Appliances (ESAs), including electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints, for the active management of demand on the electricity network, known as Demand Side Response (DSR). The ESA programme, led by BSI, supports these aims while informing a wider policy and standardization approach.

> **Example 1:**
>
> The Ministry of Trade and Industry in Trinidad and Tobago has conducted awareness campaigns to highlight the country's consumer protection policies based on product standards and good manufacturing practices for the food industry.

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23  See *International Standards and Trade – What does the research say?*
24  Ditto
25  Ditto
26  Brunsson and Jacobsson (2000) note that "Standards facilitate contact, co-operation, and trade over large areas and even throughout the world".

- **Innovation, digital transformation and interoperability:** In the field of telecommunications, critical and emerging technologies and electronics, International Standards provide a common foundation for shaping public policies that encourage and promote technological advancement and enable the seamless integration of new technologies into society while fostering trust.

> **Example 3:**
>
> Malaysia encourages public and private entities to adopt various management system standards, including ISO/IEC 27001 (information security management systems) and ISO 22301 (business continuity management systems) for network channel interface (NCI) and Cloud service providers.

- **Infrastructure and development:** Within the realms of construction, transportation and urban planning, the adoption of International Standards can facilitate the creation of public policies aimed at well-planned urban areas and smart cities, safe transportation systems and reliable infrastructure networks.

> **Example 4:**
>
> In Canada, some public safety sectors have formed regulatory authority advisory bodies (RAABs) which are committees formed to facilitate the consistent application of regulations, standardization, and conformity assessment across federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The Standards Council of Canada (SCC) has signed Memoranda of Understanding with the electrical, plumbing, gas and, fire safety, and energy efficiency RAABs to formalize their collaborative relationship.

- **Global collaboration:** International Standards foster collaboration among governments, industries, academia and civil society. Policymakers can use these standards to engage in cross-border dialogues, share knowledge and collectively address global challenges.

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📑 **Example 5:**

The UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative aims to provide a framework through which standards bodies are able to make the standards they develop, and the standards development process they follow, gender responsive. Established in 2016, the initiative has the objectives of (i) strengthening the use of standards and technical regulations as powerful tools to attain SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); (ii) integrating a gender lens in the development of both standards and technical regulations; and (iii) elaborating gender indicators and criteria that could be used in standards development.

While International Standards provide valuable guidance and can underpin trust, the adoption and implementation of these standards often varies depending on a particular country's legal, cultural and economic context as well as its quality infrastructure (QI). An important policy instrument related to the development and strengthening of a fit-for-purpose national and regional QI is a "quality policy". This is an important topic in its own right and its role and purpose are clearly described in the document *Quality Policy – Technical Guide*, published by UNIDO[27].

International Standards underpin trust and inspire confidence, and accredited CA services[28], underpinned by these standards, provide high levels of assurance. It is important to remember that use of the standards in the ISO/CASCO Toolbox[29] provides confidence in CA activities. Policymakers must also take these factors into account when considering the incorporation of International Standards into their public policies to ensure effective and relevant outcomes related to their policy objective.

Even with these considerations in mind, regulators can still rely on ISO standards for internationally harmonized solutions that are regularly reviewed and improved. These provide a solid technical base that governments can use to achieve their national and international policy objectives and commitments. Developing International Standards is a multi-million-dollar process in terms of the time, money and expertise required. Policymakers should always consider the use of existing standards to save time, money and effort as they can provide much of the technical detail and safety requirements needed for effective policy.

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27 Available at https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/files/2018-06/QP_TECHNICAL_GUIDE_08062018_online.pdf
28 More details regarding the relationship between technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment in the context of the WTO TBT Agreement can be found in *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 10, p. 34.
29 Full details can be found at https://casco.iso.org/toolbox.

# 6. What benefits can International Standards offer?

International Standards can positively impact various sectors of the economy, public safety and the environment.

Some key benefits of using standards that policymakers should consider is their capacity to:

- **Drive innovation:** Standards are a catalyst for innovation as they provide a common framework that encourages the development of new technologies, products and processes, enabling businesses to stay competitive in a rapidly changing global marketplace[30].

- **Enhance product quality and safety:** Standards ensure the quality, safety and reliability of products and services. Compliance with standards helps protect consumers and the environment by reducing the risks that may be associated with non-conforming products and services.

- **Facilitate international trade:** Harmonization and alignment with International Standards promote trade by reducing technical barriers and allowing products to be readily accepted in global markets.

- **Promote sustainability:** Standards contribute to sustainability by promoting resource efficiency, environmental protection and the adoption of clean technologies that assist in the achievement of national and global sustainability goals, including those related to climate change and environmental conservation.

- **Support regulatory objectives:** Standards can complement and support regulatory efforts by providing a flexible and adaptable means of achieving policy goals without imposing unnecessary burdens on industry.

- **Promote digital trust:** Standards for information and cybersecurity, protection of privacy, provenance and digital interoperability are crucial to protect critical infrastructure, data and individuals and help address evolving threats.

- **Encourage fair competition:** Standards ensure a level playing field for businesses by setting common rules, preventing the creation of an unfair advantage for any particular player and thus fostering fair competition and market integrity.

- **Encourage uptake through their built-in legitimacy:** Standards development is a transparent and consensus-driven process involving diverse stakeholders, including industry, government, academia and consumers, which ensures that standards are fair and broadly accepted. Standards are not just technical documents; they are global solutions to problems. They are essential tools for achieving a wide range of policy objectives, from economic growth to environmental protection and public safety[31].

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30  For more information, see UNIDO's publication *Standards & digital Transformation: Good Governance in a Digital Age.*
31  See also *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 9.2, p. 29.

# 7. How can NSBs support the development of public policy?

Preparing and adopting public policies is the responsibility of policymakers and regulators. NSBs can play a vital role in supporting the development of public policy by providing expertise, guidance and resources related to technical standards and best practices[32]. Their involvement can help ensure that policies are well-informed, effective and aligned with International Standards[33]. It is crucial to refer to the national quality policy (NQP), where available, as it outlines the roles and responsibilities of all entities within the Quality Infrastructure System, both public and private, thereby establishing a framework of trust.

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32  Specific ways that NSBs can build bridges between themselves and policymakers and regulators is contained in *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, Stage 3, pp. 58-61.
33  To find out more about the responsibilities of policymakers, regulators and NSBs, see *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 7, pp. 25-26.

NSBs can play an important role in supporting the policy agenda. Specific ways that NSBs can contribute to the development of public policy include:

**Table 1: Policy Development and the role of an NSB**

| N° | Steps towards developing public policy | The role of the NSB |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Problem identification and agenda setting** | • **Technical expertise and foresight:** NSBs, through their technical committees, and their access to the international standards community and international standards databases, offer exclusive insights and technical expertise across various domains. They can provide policymakers with accurate and up-to-date information on industry standards, emerging trends and technological advancements. Leveraging the forward-thinking initiatives pursued by the international standards community, NSBs can advise their governments in anticipation of future requirements.<br>• NSBs can collaborate with ISO to conduct a systematic exercise to identify any current and emerging problems and propose new work items to ISO/TCs. |
| 2 | **Policy analysis** | • **Impact assessment:** NSBs can assist those responsible for conducting regulatory impact assessments by providing their knowledge and insights on the potential effects of policy proposals on industries, businesses and consumers. Such insight can help in identifying potential challenges and opportunities associated with the proposed policies. |
| 3 | **Policy formulation** | • NSBs can provide valuable input during the policy formulation process and assist policymakers in better understanding the practical implications of different policy options. They can subsequently offer voluntary standards, and CA services, as an additional or alternative tool to achieve the policy objective, complementing regulation and legislation.<br>• By incorporating technical standards into project designs, policymakers can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their various initiatives. |
| 4 | **Stakeholder engagement** | • Stakeholder engagement: NSBs can provide support to policymakers in addressing their need for stakeholder engagement. NSBs interact with, and involve, a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the standards development process. These stakeholders may include industry representatives, academia and consumer advocacy organizations.<br>• NSBs can help communicate the purpose and value of policy objectives to a wide range of stakeholders across the economy.<br>• Encouraging NSB stakeholders to take an active and appropriate role in a policy development process would assist in achieving well-balanced polices that take account also of these different perspectives and viewpoints.<br>• Conflict resolution: When conflicts arise over technical matters, NSBs can provide an impartial forum for resolving disputes and finding consensus among stakeholders. |

| 5 | Decision making | • No role |
|---|---|---|
| 6 | Implementation | • International collaboration: NSBs are members of ISO and other international standards bodies such as the IEC, where they engage with these and other international standards organizations to develop globally recognized standards. This cooperative effort ensures that policies based on them are aligned with international best practices and facilitate trade and cooperation.<br><br>• Development of standards: NSBs contribute to regional and international standardization activities and, when necessary, they can develop the standards tailored to address specific needs while adhering to good standardization practice (GSP). Policymakers can reference these standards when formulating regulations and policies to ensure consistency and alignment with industry norms.<br><br>• Conformity assessment: Many NSBs have the capacity to offer testing and inspection services as well as certification programmes based on the ISO/CASCO Toolbox[34] of standards tailored for these purposes. Furthermore, they can leverage and advocate the utilization of services from internationally recognized accreditation bodies for the impartial and unbiased verification of the competence of these services within specific scopes of activity. |
| 7 | Monitoring and evaluation | • By using appropriate International Standards in monitoring and evaluation frameworks, policymakers can better measure progress and assess whether policy objectives are being met in a more transparent and comparable way. This helps ensure that the relevant metrics used in assessing policy outcomes are achievable and measurable. |
| 8 | Policy adjustment | • The monitoring and evaluation process will provide a good indication of how the policy objectives are being met. In case the results are not meeting expectations, the NSB can provide technical input on any adjustment required. |
| 9 | Policy termination or continuation | • Based on the feedback NSBs gather from the marketplace and their stakeholders, they can provide valuable feedback to those responsible for deciding whether to continue, adjust or terminate a policy. |
| 10 | Public communication | • **Public awareness:** NSBs can play a role in elevating public awareness about the importance of adhering to technical standards. Such efforts can further policy objectives pertaining to consumer protection, public safety and quality assurance. |

By collaborating with NSBs, policymakers can tap into a valuable source of technical expertise and industry knowledge that can enhance the quality and effectiveness of public policies. Such a collaboration helps bridge the gap between stated policy objectives and subsequent implementation, leading to the successful achievement of the intended policy outcomes[35].

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34 More details on the concept of conformity assessment and the role of the ISO/CASCO Toolbox in supporting these activities can be found in Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies, paragraph 10, pp. 34-36.
35 See also *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*, paragraph 9.4, pp. 31-33.

# 8. How can NSBs support the implementation of public policy instruments?

NSBs can contribute to the effective deployment of different policy instruments in the following ways:

**Table 2: Policy implementation and the role of an NSB**

| N° | Public policy instruments | The role of the NSB |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Legislation and regulations** | • NSBs are the gateway to International Standards developed by ISO and IEC and they maintain the database of national adoptions of International Standards.<br><br>• NSBs can develop standards that provide criteria and guidelines suitable for integration into legal and regulatory frameworks.<br><br>• The referencing of standards in regulations can help policymakers bring clearer and more achievable requirements in regulations, making them more understandable, practical and enforceable.<br><br>• NSBs can develop standards that serve as the basis for regulatory instruments such as guidelines, permits and licences, which enhances consistency and clarity in regulatory frameworks.<br><br>• Policymakers can reference established standards when creating regulatory instruments, ensuring that regulations are based on recognized industry norms. |
| 2 | **Incentives and disincentives** | • NSBs can provide information on recognized best practices and industry benchmarks which policymakers can use to design incentives that encourage compliance and promote desired behaviours.<br><br>• By aligning incentives with recognized standards, policymakers ensure that the incentives are tied to meaningful and measurable outcomes. |
| 3 | **Legal enforcement** | • NSBs can provide the technical support through accredited and recognized CA services, which is very powerful when used in a court of law. |
| 4 | **Programmes and projects** | • NSBs can collaborate with policymakers and help them define technical requirements for programmes and projects to ensure that projects are designed and implemented according to industry best practices.<br><br>• By incorporating standards into project designs, policymakers can enhance the quality and effectiveness of their various initiatives. |

| 5 | **Collaboration and networking, including PPPs** | • NSBs help facilitate collaboration by bringing together national and regional stakeholders, from the public and private sector, to develop and approve standards. This supports effective partnership building for policy implementation.<br><br>• Policymakers can leverage established collaborations within the NSB standards development process to foster partnerships that support policy goals.<br><br>• NSBs can support the policy monitoring and evaluation process by informing policymakers of any issues around the implementation of standards in TRs, including unintended consequences, or if there are any gaps in the market.<br><br>• Collaboration between NSBs and policymakers is crucial for creating a regulatory environment that fosters innovation, ensures safety and supports economic development. |
| 6 | **Information, awareness and communication campaigns** | • **Public awareness:** NSBs can play a role in elevating public awareness about the importance of adhering to standards.<br><br>• Such efforts can further policy objectives pertaining to consumer protection, public safety and quality assurance and help to drive social, environmental and economic change across the economy |
| 7 | **Pilot programmes and demonstrations** | • NSBs can suggest the inclusion of relevant standards in pilot programmes to demonstrate the possible impact of standards to achieve policy objectives.<br><br>• NSBs can offer capacity building training, workshops and educational resources to policymakers to enhance their understanding of matters. This can empower policymakers to make informed decisions that are based on a solid understanding of industry standards |

# 9. How can NSBs engage policymakers in standardization?

Many government officials need a better understanding of the relevance and importance of International Standards in supporting the formulation and implementation of public policies and regulations.

In order to build bridges with public policy makers, NSBs should continually familiarise themselves with the political landscape at the national, regional and international level in order to pro-actively identify those political challenges for which standards and standardisation can help in providing solutions. Studying government platforms, following media coverage, studying budget documents and legislative proposals are common ways to achieve this. Understanding context is key. The onus is on the NSB to communicate in the language of the policymakers which may vary with national contexts. With such insights in hand, NSBs are better prepared to pro-actively engage with public policymakers.

NSBs can underscore the benefits of integrating International Standards into the national, regional and international context by having a repository of successful national and international case studies. In this regard, a key point to highlight is the WTO TBT Agreement. As explained previously, technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures, in accordance with relevant International Standards, are presumed to not cause any unnecessary obstacles to trade. The WTO TBT Technical Committee has developed six principles for the development of International Standards, guides and recommendations[36]. The International Standards developed by ISO, IEC and ITU, jointly known as the World Standards Cooperation, are in line with the WTO six principles.

Encouraging policymakers to partake in the development of International Standards, through national technical committees, allows them to stay informed of (and provide input into) ongoing developments related to their area of responsibility, which they may find useful in support of their policy goals. It is important that the NSB is up to date on the different ISO/IEC technical committees and the standards development work so that it can relate it to the national priorities of the country.

**Example 6:**

The British Standards Institution (BSI) has a dedicated process for responding to government consultations, seeks to provide evidence to parliamentary enquiries, and arranges regular meetings with key officials. BSI uses a political monitoring service (an external agency) to provide it with alerts and targeted information, it commissions research projects, and it participates in cross-government projects. BSI recommends other NSBs to consider employing government engagement professionals, whose role is not financially or commercially motivated, but who seek to open conversations with relevant officials about the role of voluntary standards.

**Example 7:**

Colombia has approximately 29 regulatory bodies, all of them in the area of product regulations. The NSB of Colombia, ICONTEC, has assigned their directorate of standardization to manage relations with government policymakers and regulators. An annual relationship plan is developed by their Executive Director to guide the organization in their interactions with these public sector stakeholders. As part of preparing the plan, meetings are held with the identified regulatory entities to discuss their needs based on an annual regulatory plan defined by each regulator.

36 WTO│Principles for the Development of International Standards, Guides and Recommendations

Historically, many NSBs were housed in, or worked mainly with, national ministries responsible for trade. Given such linkages, it is not surprising that a strong focus was placed on standardization and associated CA activities that facilitated international trade. In light of the interconnected global challenges that all governments today are facing, NSBs should actively extend their engagement to other ministries and regulatory bodies, advocating the benefits of using International Standards while building closer and more supportive relationships.

To facilitate such relationship building, ISO is developing thematic policy briefs to assist NSBs in their outreach to ministries in areas such as the environment, health, energy, digital technologies and small business development. An essential step in this endeavour is the inclusion of their policy-related standards development work in the national standardization strategy (NSS). The NSS development and revision process should involve regular and meaningful interaction with public policymakers so that the NSS also incorporates their needs in an effective manner.

Furthermore, NSBs could leverage a closer relationship with public policymakers to gather valuable feedback on difficulties experienced when implementing policy-related instruments based on standards. This feedback can be instrumental in enhancing and building capacity, including addressing the conformity assessment requirements associated with these standards.

More practical information related to engaging with policymakers, including a step-by-step guide for effective engagement between NSBs and public policymakers, can be found in the ISO publication *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*[37]. Country-level examples of the use of standards in support of public policy activities can also be found in the same document[38].

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**Example 8:**

In Jamaica, the NSB (BSJ) has partnered with entities to engrain in upcoming decision makers and policy makers the need for standards to be used to the benefit of society. A module on standardization has been included in the curriculum of a Master's degree programme at a local university, the University of Technology. A requirement of the programme is a study on the economic benefits of standards.

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# 10. Key messages for NSBs

1. The International Standards developed by ISO, IEC and the ITU, jointly known as the World Standards Cooperation, are in line with the WTO TBT six principles for the development of international standards. Using these International Standards, or the national adoptions thereof, helps countries to meet the requirements of the WTO TBT Agreement, facilitate trade, build trust, provide confidence and enable international regulatory cooperation.

2. Preparing and adopting public policies is the responsibility of policymakers and regulators. NSBs can play a vital role in supporting the development and implementation of public policy by providing expertise, guidance and resources related to technical and other standards and best practices.

3. NSBs should continually familiarise themselves with the political landscape – both nationally, regionally and internationally – in order to pro-actively identify the political challenges for which standards and standardisation can provide solutions. As a lobbyist, the onus is on the NSB to communicate in the language of the policymakers which may vary with national contexts.

4. NSBs should dedicate sufficient time, energy and resources to developing partnerships with senior-level policymakers to ensure that standards contribute appropriately to the policy agenda and the NSB is acknowledged as a trusted policy support partner. This will require systematic engagement, awareness raising, workshops, capacity building, and providing examples of how standards have supported policy initiatives. Detailed steps on how to engage with policymakers can be found in the "step-by-step guide" of the *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies*. In many countries, there are also numerous formal arenas for influence that should not be missed, like public enquiries or parliamentary hearings, that can also be used as avenues to develop or strengthen their dialogue with policymakers.

5. NSBs need to understand the policy objectives and priorities of their governments and assess how they can support policymakers in stakeholder engagement, policy development, implementation and evaluation. Such support includes identifying and promoting suitable existing ISO standards/national standards and actively engaging with relevant ISO/IEC TCs that are developing standards that could help to achieve specific policy objectives.

6. The NSB should support in the implementation of regulations based on standards by ensuring that associated conformity assessment services (i.e. testing, inspection and certification) are underpinned by the set of standards contained in the ISO/CASCO Toolbox. This could be achieved through dedicated programmes and projects.

7. ISO is developing thematic policy briefs to help NSBs engage with other ministries beyond their line ministry, including those with responsibility for the environment, trade, health, energy, technology and innovation, digital economy, and small business development.

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**Contact us**

For further information and support to engage with policymakers on standards, regulation and public policy, contact us at: capacity@iso.org

# References and resources

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# 12. Resources

ISO, *International Standards and Trade – What does the research say?*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100448.pdf

ISO, *Good Standardization Practices.*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100440.html

ISO, *National Standardization Strategies.*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100450.pdf

ISO/IEC, *Using and referencing ISO and IEC standards to support public policy.*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100358.pdf

ISO/IEC, *ISO and IEC International Standards for policymakers.*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/contents/data/publication/10/03/PUB100359.html

OECD Report, "Alternatives to Traditional Regulation".
Available at: https://www.oecd.org/gov/regulatory-policy/42245468.pdf

OECD, A to Z of Public Governance Terms [web page].
Available at: https://www.oecd.org/gov/a-to-z-public-governance.htm#:~:text=a%20line%20ministry.-,Policy,as%20requiring%20action%20or%20reform

UNIDO, *Quality Policy – Technical Guide.*
Available at: https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/files/2018-06/QP_TECHNICAL_GUIDE_08062018_online.pdf

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ISO, *Standards and public policy: A toolkit for national standards bodies.*
Available at: https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100476.html

ISO/CASCO, *Conformity assessment for standards writers – Do's and don'ts.*
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UNECE, *Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards.*
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UNIDO, *Making standards work for sustainable development: UNIDO and ISO – a longstanding partnership.*
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UNIDO, *Rebooting Quality Infrastructure for a Sustainable Future.*
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Available at: https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/files/2021-10/Standard_digital_transformation_ONLINE_FINAL.pdf

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ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 170* national standards bodies. Through its members, it brings together experts to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market-relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

ISO has published more than 25 100* International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare.

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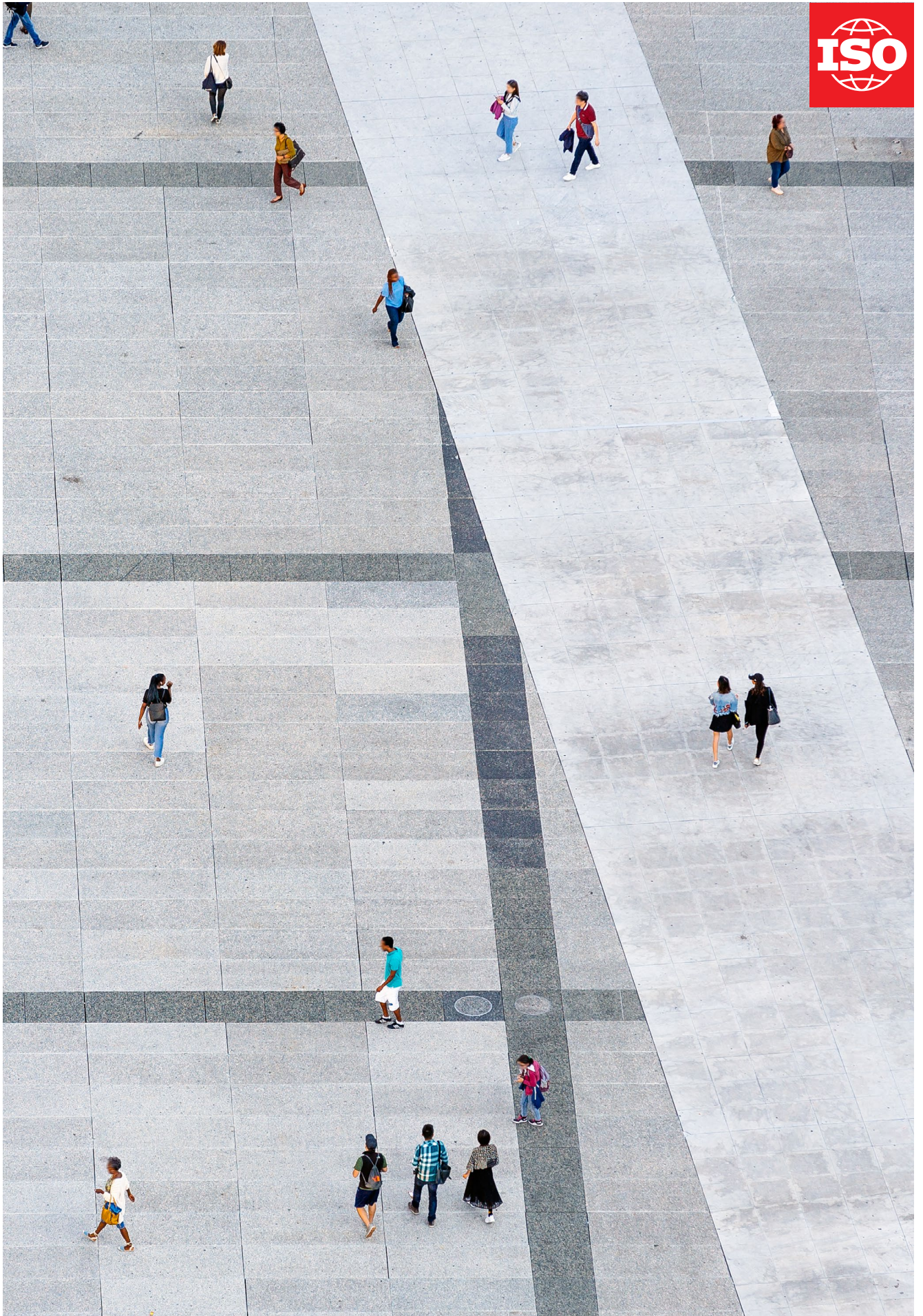
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