



copolco

# Getting *started*

About ISO/COPOLCO

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Stakeholder representation is a pillar of ISO strategy, and COPOLCO has been the means to achieve this vision for consumer stakeholders since 1979.

## Welcome to ISO/COPOLCO, ISO's consumer committee.

ISO supports the input of consumers' views in two ways:

1. Recognizing consumers as one of its important stakeholder groups in developing standards, and
2. Supporting consumer involvement in policy-making through its Committee on consumer policy (ISO/COPOLCO)

Standards often shape product characteristics. If consumers play an active role in developing standards, a product or service is more likely to meet their needs. This creates a win-win for the consumer and manufacturer or service provider.

Consumers' views in standards are shaped by eight fundamental principles enshrined in the **United Nations Guidelines for Consumer Protection**:

- The right to safety
- The right to be informed
- The right to choose
- The right to be heard
- The right to satisfaction of basic needs
- The right to redress
- The right to consumer education
- The right to a healthy environment



### Terms of reference of COPOLCO

- To study means of helping consumers benefit from standardization, and means of improving consumer participation in national and international standardization
- To provide a forum for the exchange of information on the experience of consumer participation in the development and implementation of standards in the consumer field, and on other questions of interest to consumers in national and international standardization
- To advise ISO Council as to the consolidated viewpoints of consumers on matters relevant to ISO's current and potential standardization and conformity assessment work
- To advise ISO Council on the need for new or revised policies or actions within ISO as they relate to consumers' needs

Go to [iso.org](https://www.iso.org) for more information about COPOLCO and its membership.



## Who are ISO/COPOLCO's members?

ISO/COPOLCO's members are ISO member bodies (who can join COPOLCO as Participating members: P-members, or Observer members: O-members) and ISO correspondent members (eligible as COPOLCO O-members only).

- P-members have an obligation to vote on consultations, may nominate experts to working groups, and may attend meetings
- O-members may attend meetings and comment on consultations, projects and issues
- O-members often attend meetings when they are held alongside sponsored training events

All international engagement starts at the national level. It is highly desirable for an ISO member to set up a national committee on consumer matters to coordinate national stakeholder interests, channel consumer input into the ISO member's position on standards and policy work, and to act as the country's COPOLCO mirror committee. See *ISO Connect, consumers* for **examples of countries** that have done so.

Consumers have a voice in the development of ISO International Standards through the participation of consumer representatives from ISO members in ISO's technical committees and liaison organizations such as Consumers International.

COPOLCO does not actually develop International Standards: it provides policy advice to the ISO

Council, proposes **new projects and technical areas** of consumer interest, and coordinates input of consumer views into ISO's work. However, COPOLCO develops and maintains **ISO/IEC Guides** on consumer-facing themes (e.g. product information, instructions for use, packaging, comparative testing, child safety, and services) for use by standards writers.

Each ISO member should designate an individual as its “COPOLCO contact person” to serve as the intermediary between COPOLCO and the country’s consumer interests at the national level. This person has certain responsibilities, such as circulating COPOLCO consultations to concerned stakeholders, collating responses and submitting consolidated views to the COPOLCO Secretariat; voting and commenting on work; establishing and maintaining channels for consultation; and encouraging consumer participation.

Find out more about **the role of the COPOLCO contact person and the mirror committee** in *ISO Connect, consumers*.

Consult the **ISO membership manual**, as well as the **ISO/IEC Directives**, for more details about the rights and obligations of ISO members.

If you are new to ISO, consult the informative brochure **My ISO job: What delegates and experts need to know**, which introduces ISO’s work and roles in the technical community.



## Added value of ISO/COPOLCO

Founded in 1978, COPOLCO is the policy-making “think tank” on consumer matters for ISO, and reports directly to ISO Council, the executive governance body of ISO. ISO/COPOLCO’s mission is to promote and facilitate consumer input into ISO’s policy and technical work, and to help consumers around the world benefit from standardization.

COPOLCO acts as an early warning system for market trends and focuses views from users of goods and services. It injects emerging topics into standardization. The best-known example is ISO 26000, *Guidance on social responsibility*, which COPOLCO proposed in 2002 and which is now implemented by leading companies in more than 80 countries around the world<sup>1)</sup>. A more recent example is ISO’s decision to launch work on privacy by design following COPOLCO’s recommendations, which focused on addressing consumers’ vulnerability in their interactions with digitally connected consumer products<sup>2)</sup>. See more examples on **iso.org**.

## How ISO involves consumers’ views

Consumer stakeholders can participate at the national level as part of a national technical committee or a working group, or at the international level as part of an ISO national delegation at a technical committee meeting. **Members of Consumers International** or **ANEC**, the European consumer voice in standardisation, can nominate consumer representatives to contribute directly at the international level.

1) *The rise of being “social”* ([www.iso.org/news/ref2204.html](http://www.iso.org/news/ref2204.html))

2) *Data privacy by design: a new standard ensures consumer privacy at every step* ([www.iso.org/news/ref2291.html](http://www.iso.org/news/ref2291.html))



An individual consumer representative can participate in ISO activity in several ways:

- As a working group expert
- As a consumer representative in a technical or policy committee, or
- As part of a consultative group within a standards development organization

Representatives of consumer organizations and informed individuals exercise this influence through the ISO member in their country or through liaison organizations such as Consumers International or ANEC. A consumer representative represents a consumer organization or group rather than an individual position.

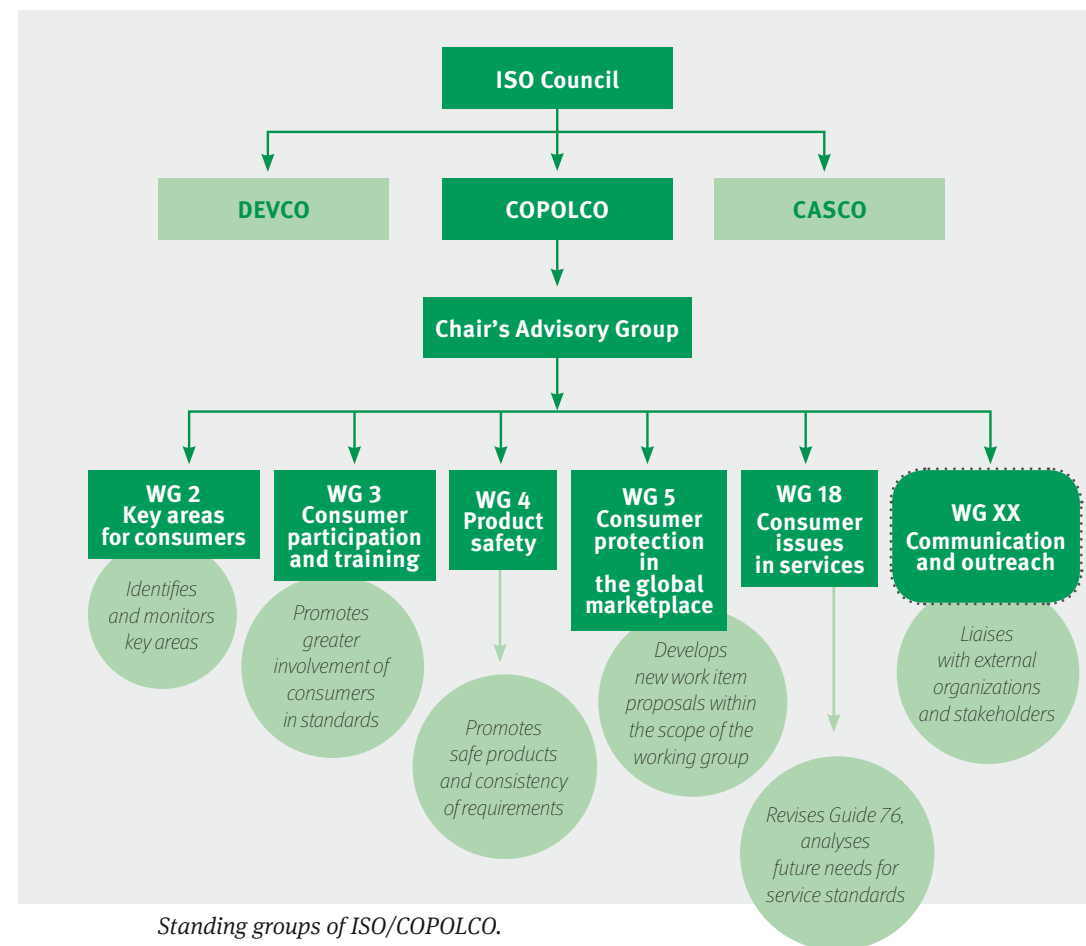
## Related organizations

The International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) produces standards for electrical consumer goods and participates in ISO/COPOLCO to develop ISO/IEC Guides relating to consumers.

In addition, there are four liaison members of ISO/COPOLCO: Consumers International (CI), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Committee on Consumer Policy (OECD/CCP), the International Organization for Legal Metrology (OIML) and the European consumer voice in standardisation (ANEC).

## ISO/COPOLCO's structure and working groups

COPOLCO's work is carried out by working groups of experts nominated by COPOLCO P-members. Experts in working groups represent an individual position in their area of expertise rather than a coordinated national position.



Standing groups of ISO/COPOLCO.

To find out more, go to  
**ISO Connect.**



## Policy work

The COPOLCO Chair is elected by the ISO Council for a two-year term, renewable once.

The Chair is a permanent member of the ISO Council and participates in the Council Standing Committee on Strategy and Policy (CSC/SP).

The Chair works with the Chair's Advisory Group (CAG) and an executive sub-group to coordinate the work of different working groups. The role of each working group appears on the chart **page 9**. By decision of the ISO General Assembly in 2017, the Chair appoints a Vice-Chair who assists with chairing and representation duties.

In addition, ISO/COPOLCO forms ad hoc groups from time to time, to revise ISO/IEC Guides on consumer-facing themes, and to identify consumer implications of such issues as privacy by design and the sharing economy.

For more information about working groups, consult the brochure ***Getting started toolkit for working group Convenors*** and the ***ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1 and Consolidated ISO Supplement*** (9<sup>th</sup> edition), 2018, Clause 1.12.



## Meetings

The annual ISO/COPOLCO plenary is usually in May, depending on the priorities of the host and the timing of other international meetings. The Secretariat organizes the plenary with related events, either in Geneva or in a host country on the invitation of another COPOLCO member.

An annual workshop is organized each year in conjunction with the plenary, dealing with a theme of consumer interest. When the plenary and workshop take place outside Geneva, the theme is decided in consultation with the host country. In addition,

COPOLCO organizes training jointly with ISO's capacity-building programme. Both subject-specific and train-the-trainer programmes have been held. See **past workshops** on COPOLCO's eCommittees public information space.

The Chair's Advisory Group and other standing groups organize a week of meetings in Geneva, usually in November. COPOLCO working and task groups may also organize meetings at other times of the year, including by ISO's teleconferencing tool, Zoom, or e-mail discussion.



## Effective stakeholder representation

Effective stakeholder representation is an obligation for all ISO members, in accordance with ISO's **Code of Conduct** and the brochure **Guidance for ISO national standards bodies. Engaging stakeholders and building consensus**. ISO/COPOLCO aims to promote this effectively by developing resources for COPOLCO members to use for training and outreach at the national level.

Consumer representatives play a vital role in ensuring ISO's global relevance and market responsiveness by providing feedback and a reality check for such characteristics as safety, sustainability, reliability, compatibility, accessibility, transparent information, quality of goods and services, and channels for redress.

## To find out more

Freely available resources are available in the public information area of ISO's **eCommittees platform**.

National standards bodies are encouraged to access and use freely available resources on ISO's Website as part of their stakeholder outreach and education programmes, including the **benefits of standards** for consumers and a **COPOLCO overview** leading to a **resources page** with information on publications, **workshops and seminars**.

You can read more on why and how to build effective consumer participation in the publications:

- *ISO and the consumer*
- *Involving consumers: Why and how – practical guidance for standards development bodies*
- *Your voice matters: Why consumers need to participate in standards-making... and how to get involved*

Also try the interactive online tutorial **Consumers and standards: Partnership for a better world**, a valuable resource for consumers to build their knowledge of the role of standards in supporting consumer protection. This tutorial shows how effective consumer participation in international and national standards is key to developing standards that will meet consumer needs.

The **ISO Consumer update** informs on ISO and COPOLCO events, recent developments in COPOLCO working and policy groups, newly published consumer standards, members' news and interesting links.

Share your news:  
[copolco@iso.org](mailto:copolco@iso.org)





### The ISO Directory of consumer interest participation

The ISO Directory of consumer interest participation (in development) shows the “consumer” profile of each national standards body: its delegated and other contributing consumer interest organizations, structures and mechanisms for consumer participation at international and national levels; and various resources and platforms for consumer participation, for sharing best practices.

**ISO Connect** is for people working within the ISO system who want to know more about, or participate in, ISO’s general activities. It provides news and high-level information about ISO initiatives excluding the technical work. It can help you find information you need and connect with people who can tell you more. Download the user guide [here](#).

ISO’s online browsing platform helps you find standards and guides: [www.iso.org/obp](http://www.iso.org/obp)

### Social media pages

Follow “ISO Consumers” on **Facebook** and **Twitter**, as well as on ISO’s social media sites.



For any further questions, contact us at [copolco@iso.org](mailto:copolco@iso.org).

This brochure complements the **ISO membership manual**, the **ISO Strategy 2016-2020**, and the publication *Getting started toolkit for ISO working group Convenors*. Together, these tools will provide a solid foundation for understanding and participating in COPOLCO’s work and related consumer-facing activity in ISO.

## Abbreviations

### **CASCO**

Committee on conformity assessment

### **COPOLCO**

Committee on consumer policy

### **ISO/CS**

International Organization for Standardization/  
Central Secretariat

### **NSB**

National standards body

### **CSC/SP**

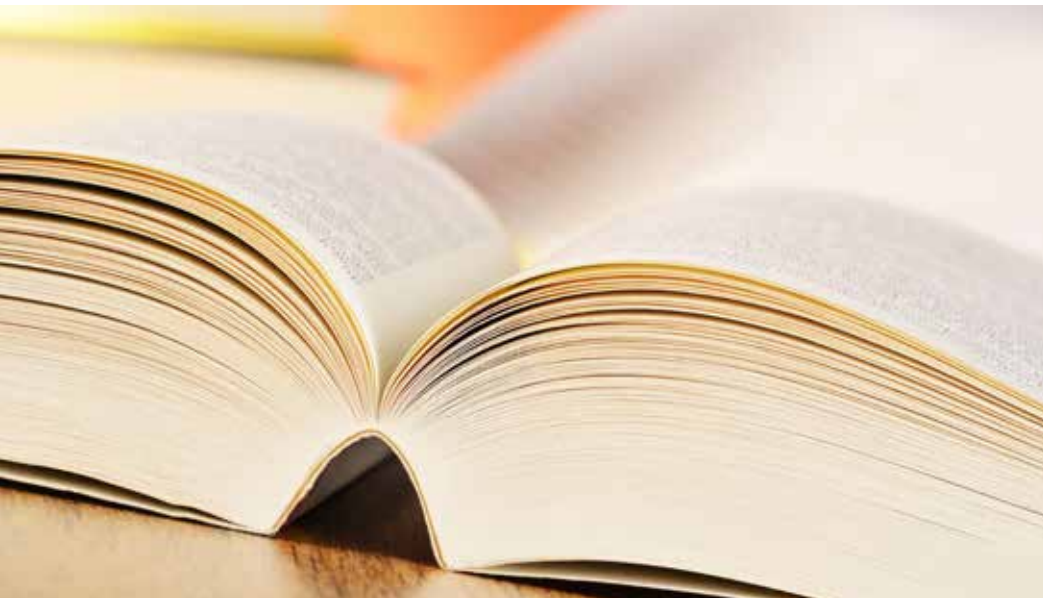
Council Standing Committee on Strategy  
and Policy

### **CAG**

Chair's Advisory Group

Need more help  
with ISO jargon?

See the online **Glossary**.



## Terms and definitions

### **Consumer**

an individual member of the general public purchasing or using property, products or services for private purposes

(Source: COPOLCO, ISO 26000)

### **Consumer representative**

a representative of a consumer organization or consumer stakeholder

### **Consumer stakeholder**

national, regional and international consumer representation bodies, independent of any organization that would fall into the “industry and commerce” category, or individual experts engaged from a consumer perspective

(Source: TMB Resolution 75/2012)

### **Consumer organization**

an independent organization which is:

- Advocating the interests of consumers before other organizations and governments
- Not for profit in character
- Not involved in the advancement of commercial interests although it may engage in trading activities related to the provision of consumer information and to promoting its own work
- Not affiliated with any political party

or

- An organization or agency that is active in consumer affairs. Such an organization or agency may, for example, specialize in one particular consumer issue such as standards, law or consumer protection

(Source: COPOLCO, online tutorial, **Consumers and standards: Partnership for a better world**)

## About **ISO**

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) is an independent, non-governmental international organization with a membership of 161 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 22 000 International Standards and related documents covering almost every industry, from technology to food safety, to agriculture and healthcare.

For more information, please visit **[www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)**.

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### **International Organization for Standardization**

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