

EA communication to EA members and accredited conformity assessment bodies regarding the outbreak of COVID-19

Due to the outbreak of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the subsequent travel restrictions established by national governments in the vast majority of countries both conformity assessment and accreditation activities have been seriously affected in different ways. In particular, conformity assessment bodies (CABs) and national accreditation bodies (NABs) are being forced to cancel or postpone most of their “in situ” activities such as on-site assessments, audits, witnessing visits and inspections and they will have to face the situation of only being able to provide their services with a workforce that is now mostly working remotely. This will affect the service provided and also lead to a possible temporary lack of access to certain supplies or services normally subcontracted by the CABs.

Under these circumstances although not all the applicable standards foresee the use of remote assessment techniques, including document reviews, and recognizing that these assessment techniques may not always enable exactly the same objective to be achieved as on-site assessments, EA suggests the use of these techniques whenever needed to substitute or complement on-site assessments.

Nevertheless EA recognises that, in certain circumstances, accredited CABs and NABs will have to take difficult decisions that could include stopping the provision of certain services or temporarily deviating, in order to be able to provide the services, from certain requirements included in the standards or in the accreditation rules.

When facing these situations, both EA members and accredited CABs are required to act responsibly, to analyse the risk of providing services with deviations from the requirements and not to provide them if such deviations jeopardize the technical validity of that specific activity. EA also expects EA NABs and accredited CABs to act with full transparency, informing affected clients of any change in the procedures and keeping records justifying the decisions taken.

Accreditation is an international activity so we recommend both NABs and accredited CABs to visit the ILAC and IAF websites where they can find useful information regarding aspects of global impact. This information also contains valuable information regarding required transition periods like the transition of laboratories to ISO/IEC 17025:2017.

For activities performed in the regulatory field or under a specific scheme CABs must seek information from scheme owners or relevant competent authorities on how they expect related conformity assessment activities should be handled under these circumstances.

As the situation is constantly changing and different countries are establishing different measures to adapt to it, accredited CABs should contact their NAB for further details or questions.

EA will closely follow the development of the coronavirus crisis in order to take any further action when needed and will publish more specific advice and relevant information.

Further information from IAF: <https://iafaq.com/>

Further information from ILAC: https://ilac.org/latest_ilac_news/potential-impact-of-coronavirus-outbreak-on-accreditation-activities/