



## ITI Position Paper: Best Practices for Certification of Telecommunication Equipment in Africa

This paper draws ITI's view of the landscape of telecommunication products certification as implemented in Africa. It is not exhaustive as it focuses on the practices widely applied over the continent and not on country specificities. The ITI position is based on known information and our experience with certification of our members' products as of April 2021.

ITI applauds the harmonization of technical requirements of most African countries with those of the European Union. This allows a same product to be sold and travel over the continent, which is in line with the current trend of trade between African countries. Duplication of tests is avoided. Such duplication would only increase cost and delay without providing any added value. Furthermore, recognition of existing test reports increases consumer welfare by giving them a wide and economically attractive choice of products. It ensures that these products are safe to the user by complying with standards that are well recognized at regional and international levels.

However, economic operators need to be informed ahead of their certification application to comply with these regulations. As there are many regulations worldwide, it is important to follow the process of notification to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Inquiry Point. This is the appropriate way to inform all stakeholders of any new regulations. Regulations should be notified sufficiently ahead of their application dates to allow enough time to implement the necessary updates of the certification processes, conformity assessment procedures, and technical requirements. We recommend a period of at least six months, and preferably one year, between introduction of a final regulation and its effective date. Currently, the WTO TBT notification procedure does not seem to be followed by most African countries when developing telecom certification regulations. ITI recommends wide application of the good regulatory practices of notification and stakeholder consultation, which are mandatory for WTO members. Notifying WTO members will allow interested and affected stakeholders across the globe to provide comments before a regulation is adopted. This can help countries refine their regulations and avoid unforeseen problems, ambiguities, and uncertainties. This good regulatory practice is critical for the awareness of the development of new regulations and revision of existing regulations, thereby improving adherence to these regulations.

Countries that are not members of the WTO can still implement equivalent measures, consistent with good regulatory practice. Public consultations of draft regulations should be organized and published on the regulator's website to give stakeholders the opportunity to comment before regulations are finalized or enforced. The publication of regulations should be advertised, and to aid with this, ITI recommends that communication be established with industry associations and other stakeholders. Enhanced clarity of any procedure and its scope

leads to reductions in time to market, costs, and resource expenditures. The scope of products addressed must be clear and accurate and broad and vague definitions should be avoided. ITI recommends limiting regulations to radio and terminal equipment that may harm a publicly available resource (such as publicly available networks or frequency spectrum). Any requirement to provide samples should be explained in terms of the necessity and purpose of the measure. When these requirements are “case by case”, the rules that trigger the request should be explained to allow certainty, leading to a smooth process.

The purpose of certification is to manage the risks related to a type of product, while optimizing the effort, costs, and resources for both the economic operators and the national authorities. Not optimizing the process would reduce, or at least delay, the range of products available on the market, increase the cost for the customer, and increase the cost and resources needed for national administration.

It is legitimate to verify that a product continues to comply with the rules. Such a check may be performed during the certificate renewal process. In most cases, a full re-test and re-certification may not be necessary. When the product or standard has not changed, a simple assessment that these conditions are met should allow the authority to grant a renewal certificate. When only part of the standards has evolved, a reassessment of the differences is necessary when the certificate expires. ITI recommends implementing a renewal procedure with a validity of at least five years for certificates.

It is usual for economic operators to commercialize a product under their own name. Indeed, a same product may be rebranded under several names. Re-testing the same product due to re-branding should not be required because rebranding classifies as a cosmetic change that does not affect the technical characteristics of a variant. When the product is identical, adoption of a single full certification is necessary. Authorities can grant the certificate of a product under other names with an equivalency letter from the manufacturer that demonstrates that the product under a new name is identical to the product initially certified. ITI recommends implementing a specific procedure for re-branding with a validity identical to the one of the original certificate.

*The Information Technology Industry Council (ITI) is the premier global advocate for technology, representing the world’s most innovative companies. Founded in 1916, ITI is an international trade association with a team of professionals on four continents. We promote public policies and industry standards that advance competition and innovation worldwide. Our diverse membership and expert staff provide policymakers the broadest perspective and thought leadership from technology, hardware, software, services, and related industries.*

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