



IAF Policy Document

Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA

Issue 4, Version 3

(IAF PL 3:2023)

The International Accreditation Forum, Inc. (IAF) facilitates trade and supports industry and regulators by operating a worldwide mutual recognition arrangement among Accreditation Bodies (ABs) in order that the results issued by Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by IAF members can be accepted globally.

Accreditation reduces risk for business and its customers by assuring them that accredited CABs are competent to carry out the work they undertake within their scope of accreditation. ABs that are members of IAF and their accredited CABs are required to comply with appropriate international standards and IAF mandatory documents for the consistent application of those standards.

ABs that are signatories to the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) are evaluated regularly by an appointed team of peers to provide confidence in the operation of their accreditation programs. The structure of the IAF MLA is detailed in IAF PL 3 - Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA. The scope of the IAF MLA is detailed in the IAF MLA Status document.

The IAF MLA is structured in five levels: Level 1 specifies mandatory criteria that apply to all ABs, ISO/IEC 17011. The combination of a Level 2 activity(ies) and the corresponding Level 3 normative document(s) is called the main scope of the MLA, and the combination of Level 4 (if applicable) and Level 5 relevant normative documents is called a sub-scope of the MLA.

- The main scope of the MLA includes activities e.g. product certification and associated mandated standards e.g. ISO/IEC 17065. The attestations made by CABs at the main scope level are considered to be equally reliable.
- The sub scope of the MLA includes conformity assessment requirements e.g. ISO 9001 and scheme specific requirements, where applicable, e.g. ISO 22003-1. The attestations made by CABs at the sub scope level are considered to be equivalent.

The IAF MLA delivers the confidence needed for market acceptance of conformity assessment outcomes. An attestation issued, within the scope of the IAF MLA, by a body that is accredited by an IAF MLA signatory AB can be recognized worldwide, thereby facilitating international trade.

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Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA

1. SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

This document describes:

- the general structure of the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA);
- the process for publication of the actual status of the scope of the IAF MLA;
and
- the processes to expand the scope of the IAF MLA.

Definition 1: *Schemes are also known as programs (specifically in the field of Validation and Verification).*

Definition 2: *Endorsed normative document - International standards, guides or sector specific schemes approved by the IAF General Assembly for inclusion in the scope of the IAF MLA.*

2. STRUCTURE OF THE IAF MLA

2.1 The IAF has established a Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) in the following form:

Level 1		ISO/IEC 17011 specifies the criteria for the Accreditation Body (AB)
Level 2	IAF MLA main scope	Accreditation Activities, in which the AB has demonstrated competence to perform accreditation as specified by the IAF endorsed generic accreditation normative documents listed in Level 3
Level 3		IAF endorsed generic accreditation normative document used by the AB to assess the Conformity Assessment Body (CAB) for each accreditation activity of Level 2
Level 4	IAF MLA sub-scope	IAF endorsed sector specific normative documents, which specify internationally recognized applications of the generic accreditation normative document listed in Level 3. The documents are used by the AB, in

		combination with the generic normative document listed in Level 3 to assess the CAB competence in the relevant sector.
Level 5		IAF endorsed conformity assessment normative document used by the accredited CABs.

Note 1: *The combination of a Level 2 activity and the Level 3 relevant normative document is called a **main scope** of the MLA.*

Note 2: *Level 4 and Level 5 do not exist for all main scopes. Level 4 and Level 5 are called **sub-scopes** of the MLA.*

Note 3: *Even though IAF documents with a mandatory application status are not specifically referenced in the IAF MLA structure these documents must still be followed accordingly.*

2.2 The scope of the IAF MLA includes main scopes and sub-scopes. The main scopes include accreditation activities (Level 2) such as the accreditation of CABs providing certification of management systems, certification of persons, certification of products, and validation & verification. These are based on international standards for conformity assessment bodies (Level 3) such as ISO/IEC 17021-1, ISO/IEC 17024, ISO/IEC 17065, and ISO/IEC 17029, as endorsed by IAF, and associated IAF application documents to the standards (see Note 3 above).

Membership to the IAF MLA for a main scope provides confidence that attestations made by CABs accredited by IAF MLA accreditation body signatories under that main scope are **equally reliable** in the outcomes of conformity assessment activities.

2.3 A main scope of the IAF MLA may specifically define sub-scopes which are conformity assessment schemes (e.g. for specific product, management system, persons or validation & verification) based on relevant standards or normative documents as endorsed by IAF and associated IAF application documents (see Note 3 above), as appropriate.

Membership to the IAF MLA for a sub-scope provides confidence that attestations of the outcomes of the specific conformity assessment scheme (e.g. ISO 9001, ISO 14001, etc) operated by CABs accredited by the IAF MLA accreditation body signatories of that sub-scope are **equivalent**.

3. PROCESS FOR PUBLICATION OF THE ACTUAL STATUS OF THE SCOPE OF THE IAF MLA

3.1. The actual endorsed status of the scope of the IAF MLA is available as a separate document “IAF MLA Status DDMMYYYY”. In this document the standards or sector schemes are referenced by their names and version numbers/dates.

3.2. The “IAF MLA Status DDMMYYYY” document does not require a separate membership ballot for publication as corresponding decisions on the IAF MLA shall have been taken in advance by the IAF Membership.

3.3. The IAF Secretariat is responsible for updating the “IAF MLA Status DDMMYYYY” document, which is published on the IAF MLA page of the IAF website, at www.iaf.nu, after a final check by the IAF MLAC Chairperson.

4. EXPANSION OF THE SCOPE OF THE IAF MLA

4.1. Procedure for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA Based on Publicly Owned (Including Regulatory) Normative Documents

4.1.1 This procedure applies to both IAF MLA main scope expansions and IAF MLA sub-scope expansions.

4.1.2 Publicly owned (including regulatory) normative documents are documents from international, regional or national standardisation/standard-setting organisations or regulatory authorities.

4.1.3 IAF members can propose to the IAF MLA Committee Chairperson to expand the IAF MLA to a specific scheme based on publicly owned normative documents which have not yet been endorsed as scopes of the IAF MLA. Following approval by the IAF MLA Committee, the IAF MLA Committee Chairperson shall bring the proposal to the IAF Executive Committee.

4.1.4 Following approval of the IAF Executive Committee, the IAF Executive Committee will establish a Task Force Group (TFG) and a TFG lead responsible for the administration of the IAF MLA scope expansion process. The competence for the project is provided by representation from a number of IAF committees; the TFG will consist of at least the IAF MLA Committee, the IAF Technical Committee and the IAF User Advisory Committee Chairpersons or their nominees. The Committee Chairpersons can assign relevant issues to sub-structures in their committees during the scope expansion process.

4.1.5 The assigned TFG shall analyse the scheme as per the criteria detailed in Annex 1. The IAF Technical Committee shall consider Annex 1 points 2, 3.a. and 3.d., and the IAF MLA Committee shall consider Annex 1 points 3.b., 3.c. and 3.d.

4.1.6 Once satisfied that the scheme conforms to the criteria in Annex 1, the TFG shall establish a recommendation for the scope of the IAF MLA to be expanded to include the scheme.

4.1.7 The TFG Lead shall submit the final recommendation to the Executive Committee for approval.

4.1.8 The Executive Committee shall ensure that the documentation and recommendation from the TFG are sufficiently clear to submit them to IAF Members for decision.

4.1.9 The decision to include an additional main scope and/or sub-scope in the IAF MLA shall be voted on in an IAF General Assembly or by electronic ballot. If accepted, it will be added to the document "IAF MLA Status DDMMYYYY" by the final day of the voting event.

4.1.10 Requests of Regions and/or ABs to extend their recognition to the new IAF MLA main scope or sub-scope are only possible after:

- a) the IAF Technical Committee has developed a specific IAF application document, if required; and
- b) the IAF MLA Committee has decided on additional preparation/measures of inclusion in the peer evaluation system, if required.

The IAF Secretary will inform members as soon as applications are possible.

4.2 Policy and Procedure for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA Based on Privately Owned Sector Schemes

4.2.1 Policy for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA based on Privately Owned Sector Schemes

4.2.1.1. IAF welcomes the opportunity to work with Scheme Owners operating a third-party international sector scheme wishing to expand the IAF MLA to include a scheme-specific IAF MLA sub-scope.

4.2.1.2. Expanding the IAF MLA is also beneficial to the Scheme Owner as it allows IAF Accreditation Body Members to contribute their expertise to the ongoing development of the scheme.

4.2.1.3 An IAF MLA sub-scope expansion to a privately owned sector scheme only demonstrates that the scheme conforms to IAF MLA requirements and the scheme is included in the IAF peer evaluation process of ABs endorsed for the scheme-specific IAF MLA sub-scope. It must not be considered a judgement on the market value or usefulness of the technical requirements of the given sector scheme or preference for use of that scheme in the scheme's sector.

4.2.2 Procedure for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA based on Privately Owned Sector Schemes

4.2.2.1 A Scheme Owner wishing to receive an IAF MLA sub-scope expansion for a sector scheme must be an IAF member.

4.2.2.2. An application for a privately owned third-party sector scheme to be included as an IAF MLA sub-scope shall be submitted to the IAF Secretary by the Scheme Owner. The application shall at a minimum include comprehensive answers to all questions in Annex 2 and all scheme-relevant documentation (at no charge to IAF). The Scheme Owner shall agree to pay fees to the ABs evaluating the scheme on behalf of IAF, except if an evaluation of the sector scheme has already been performed based on the requirements of Annex 2 within a Recognized Regional Group and the outcome of the evaluation can be used by IAF.

4.2.2.3. The new IAF MLA scope-expansion application shall be circulated to the IAF MLA Committee, IAF Technical Committee and IAF User Advisory Committee Chairpersons, who will submit their opinion and proposal to the IAF Secretary within 30 days.

4.2.2.4. The IAF Secretary shall distribute the application and feedback from the IAF MLA Committee, IAF Technical Committee and IAF User Advisory Committee Chairpersons to the IAF Executive Committee for approval to start the IAF MLA sub-scope expansion process to the Sector scheme.

Following approval of the IAF Executive Committee, the IAF Executive Committee will establish a Task Force Group (TFG) and a TFG lead responsible for the administration of the IAF MLA scope expansion process. The competence for the project is provided by representation from a number of IAF committees; the TFG will consist of at least the IAF MLA Committee, the IAF Technical Committee and the IAF User Advisory Committee Chairpersons or their nominees. The Committee Chairpersons can assign relevant issues to sub-structures in their committees during the scope expansion process.

4.2.2.5. Actions to be taken shall include the following:

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- a) The TFG will request the Recognized Regional Groups to propose an AB of their Region interested in evaluating the scheme.

The Recognized Regional Group and AB cited above must be IAF MLA signatories to the IAF MLA main scope the sector scheme is built upon. ABs with competence in accrediting CABs to the scheme are preferred choices.

- b) The TFG will assign at least 2 Accreditation Bodies from 2 different Recognized Regional Groups in which the scheme is active or is expected to be active in the short term to separately evaluate the Sector scheme according to the requirements included in Annex 2. If Accreditation Bodies of only one Recognized Regional Group are interested in performing the evaluation of a sector scheme, the IAF EC can decide to extraordinarily agree to assign 2 ABs from only one Region.

If an evaluation of the sector scheme was already performed based on the requirements of Annex 2 within a Recognized Regional Group, the outcome should be used by the assigned AB of that Recognized Regional Group.

- c) The Scheme Owner will be informed:
- by the TFG lead of the assignment and will be requested to provide answers to representatives of the assigned ABs.
 - of the fees which will be charged by the involved ABs for the evaluation of the scheme, notably when the scheme has not already been evaluated at the level of the Recognized Regional Group of the concerned ABs.
- d) The assigned ABs will finish their respective evaluations within 6 weeks.
- e) The assigned ABs will exchange their findings and work together to come to a mutual conclusion within another 6 weeks. At that stage the assigned ABs may jointly need to request clarifications/information and necessary changes to the scheme from the assigned Scheme Owner, hence the Scheme Owner representative is required to expeditiously answer any requests.
- f) The assigned ABs and Scheme Owner representative will develop a proposal for an implementation plan/work program for the proposed new sector scheme within another 4 weeks. This plan will include the identification of the needs and expectations of the sector scheme that can currently be met, and those needs and expectations that will require further scheme development.
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- g) The assigned ABs will transmit the common result/conclusions of the evaluation (even if some issues remain open/unresolved) and proposed implementation plan/work program to the TFG Lead within a maximum of 16 weeks after assignment.
 - h) The TFG will review the results of the assigned AB evaluations and implementation plan/work program within 30 days and work with the Scheme Owner to develop a specific MoU agreement between IAF and the Scheme Owner.
 - i) If sufficiently satisfied, the TFG - via the IAF MLA Secretary – will submit the result of the analysis including the implementation plan/work program to IAF MLA Committee members for a 30-day comment period.
 - j) The TFG and assigned ABs will review the IAF MLA Committee members' feedback.
 - k) The TFG and/or the assigned ABs will liaise with the Scheme Owner to close-out open issues or any required changes to the scheme.
 - l) The TFG will provide a proposal ready for voting on by the IAF membership to the Executive Committee for consideration.

4.2.2.6. If the Executive Committee supports the positive result of the TFG, an IAF membership ballot for IAF MLA sub-scope expansion will be conducted (in an IAF General Assembly or by electronic balloting) based on the result of the evaluation process (including all the relevant documents) and including the IAF-Scheme Owner MoU referenced in 4.2.2.5.h).

4.2.2.7. The sector scheme will become an IAF MLA sub-scope once the IAF Chair and a Scheme Owner delegated management representative sign the MoU agreement after a successful ballot in accordance with 4.2.2.6. The newly endorsed normative documents for the sector scheme specific sub-scope shall be added to the document "IAF MLA Status DDMMYYYY" as described in clause 3 above.

4.2.2.8. Requests of Regions and/or ABs to extend their recognition to the new IAF MLA sub-scope are only possible after:

- a) the Technical Committee has developed a specific IAF application document, if required; and
- b) the MLA Committee has decided on additional preparation/measures of inclusion in the peer evaluation system, if required.

The IAF Secretary will inform members as soon as applications are accepted.

4.2.2.9. Once the scheme has been included as an IAF MLA sub-scope, any subsequent changes must be approved via the following process:

- a) The new draft (as soon as only editorial changes to the scheme version are possible) or final version and other document(s) shall be submitted by the Scheme Owner together with a detailed gap analysis and proposed transition plan for implementation of the new version document(s) to the IAF Secretary.
- b) The TC Chair and MLAC Chair shall each at least assign one competent person to review the submission and the adequacy of the transition period to allow CABs/ABs to adjust their operation to the introduced changes.
- c) The result of the review shall be transmitted by the assigned persons according to point b) above within 4 weeks to the Technical Committee and MLA Committee Chairpersons for their decision as to whether the scheme continues to comply with IAF PL3. If the changes to the scheme are substantial, an evaluation according to 4.2.2.5 will be initiated and an IAF membership ballot for the new version of the scheme will be conducted.

End of Policies and Procedures on the IAF MLA Structure and for Expansion of the Scope of the IAF MLA

Further Information

For further Information on this document or other IAF documents, contact any member of IAF or the IAF Secretariat.

For contact details of members of IAF see the IAF website: <http://www.iaf.nu>

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ANNEX 1**Information to be provided on the proposed inclusion of standards/normative documents in the IAF MLA**

1. General description/explanation of the proposed standards/normative documents (including the scope of the MLA for the standards/normative documents):

IAF Requirement		
2. General Criteria (IAF TC responsibility)	Descriptive information of how requirement is met or to be met*	Comments**
a) Significant relevance to the accreditation of conformity assessment bodies under the scope of the IAF activities.		
b) Sufficient substance to enhance the recognition of professional competence.		
c) Fulfils appropriate needs on an international, regional or national basis.		
d) Lack of inclusion poses threats to IAF leadership in accreditation.		
e) Complementary to or supportive of any of the other standards being currently used.		
f) Does not contradict any existing standard under the MLA, including ISO/IEC 17011.		

g) Document must be produced by a consensus process.		
h) As a precondition for IAF expanding the IAF MLA into a new main scope an international standard for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies has been developed and published which contains requirements applicable to the types of conformity assessment bodies other than those covered by the existing IAF MLA main scopes.		
3. Further Actions Required	Descriptive information of how requirement is met or to be met*	Comments**
a. Need for the development of specific IAF application documents for inclusion of publicly owned standards/normative documents in the MLA (IAF TC responsibility*). IF YES, development of the document		
b. Need for additional preparation of peer evaluation (IAF MLAC responsibility*).		
c. Peer evaluation methodology to be used (IAF MLAC responsibility*)		
d. IAF MLA levels of the new		

standards/normative documents (Joint IAF TC and IAF MLAC responsibilities*)		
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* to be filled in by the Person(s) proposing the IAF MLA sub-scope expansion

** to be filled in by the respective Committees, which need to recommend the IAF MLA sub-scope expansion in their respective (and indicated) field of competence

ANNEX 2**Information to be provided for the inclusion of a private sector scheme as a new sub-scope in the IAF MLA****1. General description/explanation of the proposed sector scheme**

(please provide information on its scope and any other information relevant to the scheme's operation, which is not covered in the tables 2,3 4 below):

IAF Requirement		
2. Objective Evidence	Information and/or evidence of how requirement is met or to be met*	Comments**
a) Evidence of the scheme owner representing a substantial part of the affected sector and market impact of the sector scheme.		
b) Evidence that normative document(s) of the sector scheme (e.g. for specific product, management system, person certification or validation & verification) are based upon publicly available normative documents, which has(have) been developed and will be reviewed and updated as required at appropriate intervals in an open and transparent manner, is(are) set out preferably		

in separate normative documents from the conformity assessment requirements, in order to assist transparency, non-discrimination and open competition among conformity assessment through a consensus process involving participation by interested parties and is publicly available.		
c) Evidence that the sector scheme has clear international, regional or national market support.		
d) Evidence of operating and administrating in an open, non-discriminatory and transparent manner, avoiding conflicts of interest or limitation on the acceptance of conformity assessment bodies or accreditation bodies other than relevant technical considerations.		
e) Evidence that the sector scheme is based on the international standards for accreditation of conformity assessment bodies without any requirements which either contradict or exclude any of the requirements of ISO/IEC 17011 nor of the relevant IAF MLA level 3 accreditation standard.		
3. Policy Declarations	Declaration on how the IAF Policy	Comments**

	requirements will be met*	
a) Intends to make effective use of the expertise of IAF MLA signatories and the value of the IAF worldwide MLA.		
b) Commits to use IAF application documents, with specific requirements for accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies which are prepared by IAF in co-operation with the scheme owner, where such documents are required as determined by IAF.		
c) Confirms that no discrimination of ABs wishing to provide accreditation to an IAF MLA sub-scope endorsed sector scheme are contained in the scheme.		
d) Commits to involve only the accreditation bodies which are signatories of the IAF MLA in the operation of the scheme.		
e) Agrees to make all normative documents relevant to its sector scheme available at a fair and reasonable cost for Members of IAF and their applicants/accredited bodies to adopt into their accreditation/conformity assessment programs.		

f) Understands what IAF can and can not provide.		
g) Agrees to contribute to the development of specific requirements for accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies for the sector scheme if needed.		
h) Agrees to contribute to the development and preparation of any requirements specific to its scheme in order to meet the scheme owner's particular needs (if such specific requirements are needed).		
i) Guarantees that the sector scheme does not include provisions violating the requirements of the IAF MLA level 3 standard the sector scheme is built upon.		
j) Accepts that changes of the sector scheme after IAF endorsement are not automatically covered by an IAF MLA sector scheme sub-scope.		
k) Accepts and understands the IAF policy for endorsement of privately owned normative documents as set out in Clause 4.2.1.		
l) Agrees to provide new draft version document(s) with a gap analysis for		

evaluation (4.2.2.9) and proposed transition plan for implementation of new version document(s) to IAF in order to allow IAF to make sure, that the scheme continues to comply with the requirements in PL3 in a timely manner.		
4. Specific Requirements	Information*	Comments
a) scheme owner must be an IAF Member (membership since when)		**
b) scheme owner liaison representative's name and contact details with decision-making responsibilities sufficient to be able to answer corresponding questions expeditiously (within at least 7 days).		**
c) Specific requirements for accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies prescribed by the sector scheme (if any) not included in the corresponding IAF MLA level 3 standard the sector scheme is built upon.		***
d) Need for IAF to develop specific requirements for accreditation bodies and conformity assessment bodies for the sector scheme.		****

- * Information and/or documented evidence as to how the IAF requirements are met, or will be met by the sector scheme, to be filled in by the scheme owner for every field.
- ** to be filled in by the assigned ABs involved in the review and, where required, by the Task Force Group appointed by the Executive Committee
- *** to be filled in by the IAF TC
- **** to be verified by the IAF Secretary