

TESTING

ACCREDITATION

INSPECTION

CALIBRATION

VERIFICATION

CERTIFICATION

EXAMINATION



European  
co-operation for  
Accreditation

# The EA Multilateral Agreement (MLA)

Facilitating cross border trade in safe and reliable goods and services

## What is accreditation?

All countries, and all market sectors, have seen an increase in the number of technical regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures. Generally, these are introduced to meet the requirements of quality and safety that consumers, businesses and regulators demand of goods and services.

The increasing number of specified standards has seen a corresponding growth in the number of organisations providing third-party evaluation of conformity and compliance with these standards.

The **accreditation process** determines the technical competence and integrity of organisations that offer testing, examination, verification, inspection, calibration and certification services (collectively known as **conformity assessment**). Accreditation operates in the public interest across all market sectors, providing a transparent and impartial assessment of these services, against internationally recognised standards and other national or sectoral requirements.



## What is the EA MLA?

The EA MLA is a signed agreement between EA accreditation body members to recognise and accept the equivalence and reliability of their individual accreditation services and thus the certificates and reports issued by the organisations they accredit (conformity assessment results).

Although voluntary and mandatory technical regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures can all serve legitimate public policy goals but they can also vary from country to country, or can be costly and burdensome in their effect.

As a result they can be detrimental to businesses, hindering access to markets and export opportunities. Acknowledging this, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade strongly encourages countries to recognise the results of other countries' conformity assessments such as testing, examination, verification, inspection, calibration and certification services.

International markets have confidence in the EA MLA and the conformity assessment results provided by organisations accredited by EA MLA signatories. Because of this, there is no need for products and services to be re-tested, re-calibrated, re-inspected or re-certified in each country into which they are imported and sold. This helps the free movement of goods and services in Europe and the rest of the world.

## About the EA

The EA is appointed by the European Commission\* to manage the accreditation infrastructure within the EU, EFTA and candidate countries. Established in 1997, the organisation is a non-profit association of nationally recognised accreditation bodies. It is responsible for harmonising accreditation within Europe, with the aim of reducing barriers to trade and protecting health, safety and the environment.

*\*Regulation (EC) No 765/2008, Article 14*



# Who benefits from the EA MLA?

The well-established, harmonised and transparent assessment procedures involved in the accreditation processes carried out by EA MLA signatories are applicable to all forms of conformity assessment and deliver benefits across the full range of economic activity.

## National governments and regulators

- Accreditation can be used to support implementation of European or national legislation. It provides a 'stamp of approval' to demonstrate compliance against agreed standards and requirements.
- Accreditation minimises risk as decisions can be based on reliable certificates or reports and there can be greater confidence in the data being used to establish baselines for monitoring and enforcement.
- The EA MLA provides a framework that allows Governments to rely on data from accredited organisations in other countries.

## Industry and the business community

- Exporting and access to new markets is made easier and less expensive because having once been tested or certified by an EA MLA-accredited body, there should be no need to re-test or re-certify a product for foreign markets.
- Importing goods and services with an EA MLA-accredited report or certificate can be both less risky and cheaper because accreditation confirms conformity to recognised standards of consistency and quality and can therefore also avoid the costs of re-testing.
- The EA MLA helps remove barriers to trade and supports development of a free market in Europe. Being recognised internationally, the EA MLA also opens new opportunities on the global market.
- Buying conformity assessment services from an organisation accredited by an EA MLA signatory can also help businesses differentiate their services by providing evidence of technical competence, impartiality and compliance with international requirements within their supply chain.

## Consumers

- Accreditation can impact positively on all aspects of our daily life from the safety of the products we buy to the quality of the environment we live in. The accreditation of testing, inspection and certification ensures that these activities are carried out by competent organisations. The influence of accreditation may not always be recognised or understood by the consumer but it plays an important role in ensuring that he or she has access to goods and services of consistent and reliable quality and safety.

## The European Commission

- The importance of accreditation to the EU's and EFTA's economic infrastructure is recognised in Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 which provides a legal framework for the provision of accreditation services across Europe. Further, Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 contains provisions for acceptance of certificates and reports issued by accredited conformity assessment bodies, and EU Decision No 768/200/EC constitutes a general horizontal framework for future European legislation that harmonises the conditions for the marketing of products.
- Regulation (EC) No 765/2008 covers the operation of accreditation in support of voluntary conformity assessment as well as conformity assessment required by European legislation. It provides Commission Directorates with the legal basis to ensure confidence in the consistent and harmonised implementation of legislation across Europe based on accreditation.
- The existence of the EA MLA means that national authorities in Member States can recognise—in accordance with article 11 (2) of Regulation (EC) No 765/2008—the equivalence of accreditation services provided by peer evaluated national accreditation bodies and therefore the equivalence of reports and certificates issued by the conformity assessment bodies they have accredited.



# Why the EA MLA inspires market confidence

EA and its National Accreditation Body members invest considerable effort and resource in maintaining the integrity and robustness of the EA MLA.

- National Accreditation Bodies are admitted to the MLA only after stringent peer evaluation of their operations to check their compliance with the internationally agreed standard for accreditation bodies, ISO/IEC 17011 and the specific requirements of Regulation (EC) No 765/2008. These evaluations are repeated on a regular basis.
- Evaluations are carried out by experienced senior staff from other National Accreditation Bodies and the process is observed by personnel from the European Commission, national authorities, and the EA Advisory Board consisting of stakeholders and other interested parties in the business and regulatory community.
- Evaluations include office-based scrutiny as well as the observation of assessor visits in order to determine that, before being accredited, conformity assessment bodies are examined in sufficient depth to establish their competence, impartiality and performance capability.
- To ensure consistency, transparency and acceptability to all, the peer-evaluation process is itself continuously updated to take into account the changing needs of business, regulators and national authorities. In this way, stakeholders and regulators can be assured that the National Accreditation Body's technical competence is thoroughly and appropriately evaluated.
- EA regularly reviews market feedback from organisations represented on the EA Advisory Board, including the European Commission, and from other stakeholders and interested parties. Benchmarking processes have been established and the results made available to the national accreditation bodies and stakeholders.

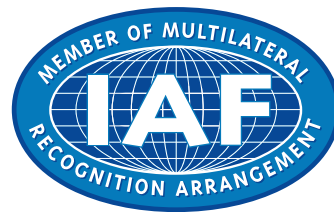
More detailed information about the peer evaluation process is available in the EA MLA Annual Report which can be downloaded from the EA website.

## Global Dimension

Outside Europe, the EA MLA is recognised by the International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC)<sup>1</sup> and the International Accreditation Forum (IAF)<sup>2</sup>.

This recognition ensures that a test report or certificate accredited by an EA MLA signatory is recognised as equivalent by the signatories of the ILAC and IAF multilateral mutual recognition agreements.

Similarly, certificates and reports issued under the global ILAC MRA and IAF MRA are accepted under the EA MLA and promoted in the European market.



<sup>1</sup>[www.ilac.org](http://www.ilac.org)

<sup>2</sup>[www.iaf.nu](http://www.iaf.nu)



# What does the EA MLA cover?

The activities, or scopes, of the EA MLA cover the following:

Accreditation of laboratories	Testing Medical examination Calibration	ISO/IEC 17025 ISO 15189 ISO/IEC 17025
Accreditation of certification bodies	Certification of products  Certification of persons Certification of management systems	EN 45011 and ISO/IEC 17065 ISO/IEC 17024 ISO/IEC 17021
Accreditation of verification bodies	Greenhouse Gas Verification	ISO 14065
Accreditation of inspection bodies	Inspection	ISO/IEC 17020



## Details of EA MLA signatories and their activities

A full list of signatories to the EA MLA and their activities for which they have signed is available on the EA website and in EA document *EA-INF/03 EA Multilateral and Bilateral Agreements and Signatory Lists*.

For more information contact:



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