GUIDE

ROAD TO BEING CERTIFIED

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Agjencia Shqiptare e Zhvillimit të Investimeve

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Introduction

Certification is a powerful tool for businesses, especially SMEs, to strengthen their market position, ensure compliance with international standards, and gain the trust of customers and partners. Certification demonstrates a company's commitment to quality, sustainability, and continuous improvement.

This guideline provides a clear, step-by-step roadmap for companies aiming to achieve their first certification, helping them navigate the process with confidence.

Step 1 — Choose the Right Certification

The first step toward certification is selecting the appropriate standard based on your business needs and sector requirements.

Common certifications include:
- **ISO 9001** (Quality Management Systems)
- **ISO 14001** (Environmental Management Systems)
- **ISO 45001** (Occupational Health and Safety Management)

Audit-Based program
- **BSCI** (Business Social Compliance Initiative)

How to choose:
- Analyze your business activities and customer expectations.
- Research sector-specific certifications.
- Consult sector organizations, chambers of commerce, or certification bodies for advice.

Step 2

Conduct a Preliminary Gap Assessment

Before formal certification, it is important to assess your current status.

Actions:
● Conduct a self-assessment or internal review using available tools and checklists.
●Identify gaps between your current operations and the requirements of the desired certification.
●Prioritize areas needing improvement.

Tip: Some standards offer free self-assessment tools on their official websites. (e.g., ISO Publications)

Step 3

Prepare for Certification

Preparation is critical to ensure success during the audit process.

Key Steps:
● **Establish a Management System**: Define processes, procedures, responsibilities, and policies based on the certification standard.
● **Internal Communication**: Develop a communication plan to inform employees and stakeholders about the certification process, their roles, and the positive impacts of certification on their daily tasks and structured work.
●**Internal Training**: Train employees on new or updated processes.
● **Document Control**: Organize and maintain necessary documentation.

Useful Resource:
●ISO Management System Standards Overview

Step 4 — Apply to a Certification Body

Once ready, companies should select an accredited certification body.

Basic Steps:
- Research accredited certification bodies.
- Submit an application form with company details, the scope of certification, and operational data.
- (Optional) Request a pre-audit or readiness assessment to identify final adjustments before the main audit.

Tip: Certification bodies list their services and application requirements on their websites.

Step 5 — Undergo Certification Audit

Certification audits typically happen in two stages:

Stage 1: Documentation Review
- Review of your management system documentation.
- Identification of any major gaps to be addressed before Stage 2.

Stage 2: On-Site Audit
- Evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of your management system.
- Interviews, observations, and document reviews.

Outcome:
- The auditor issues a report summarizing findings. If non-conformities exist, the organization must address them within a set timeframe before certification can be granted.

If the audit identifies non-conformities:

● Implement corrective actions within 30–90 days (depending on severity).
● Some cases may require follow-up verification (only if significant non-conformities are found).

Note: Minor issues might not require a full re-audit but must still be documented and corrected.

Certification Issuance

Once all requirements are satisfied:

● The certification body issues a certificate, typically valid for three years (for ISO standards).
● Surveillance audits are conducted annually to ensure ongoing compliance.

Appendix: Maintaining Certification

After obtaining certification, companies must maintain compliance to retain their certification status.

Key Activities:
● Surveillance Audits: Annual checks to verify continued compliance.
● Internal Audits and Management Reviews: Regular internal audits and leadership evaluations ensure system effectiveness and improvement.
● Re-Certification: After three years, a full reassessment is required to renew certification.
Recommendation: Treat these activities as an integral part of your quality or management culture, not just obligations.

Resources and Useful Links

●ISO Official Publications
●ISO Management System Standards Overview

By following this structured pathway, companies can effectively prepare for certification, enhance their internal systems, and align with international standards. Certification is not only a badge of compliance but a commitment to excellence and continuous improvement.

Good luck on your journey to certification!