

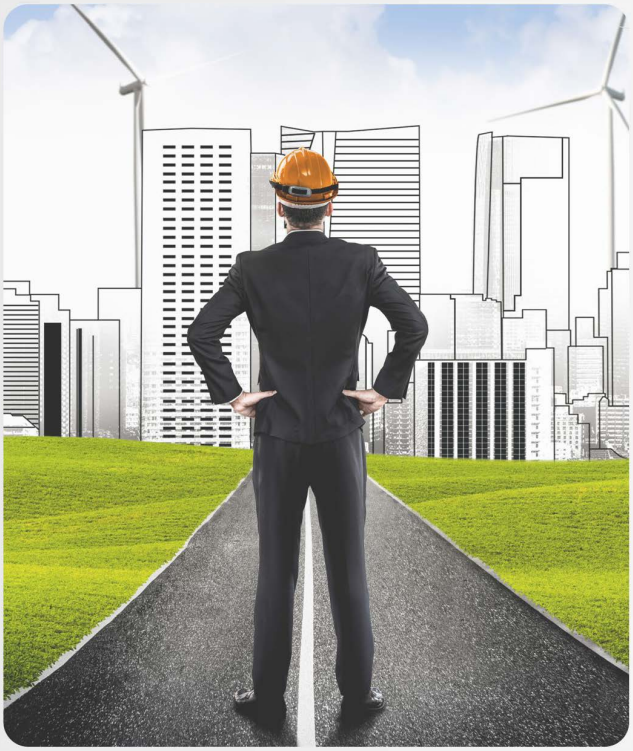
# ACCREDITED CERTIFICATION FOR PERSONS AND BENEFITS

## EXPLAINED

ISO/IEC 17024

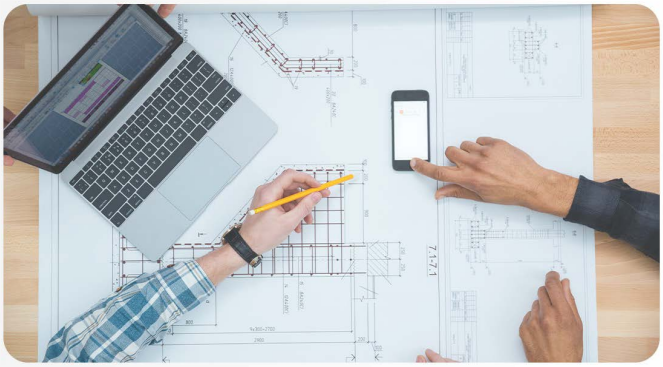
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# Introduction



**ISO/IEC 17024: Conformity Assessment – General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons** was initially published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 2003 and substantially revised in 2012. This standard was developed by experts in the field of certification of persons, including certification bodies for persons, examination development and measurement experts, and accreditation bodies, with the objective of achieving and promoting a globally accepted benchmark for organizations operating the certification of persons.

This brochure describes the importance of accredited certification to ISO/IEC 17024. It explores the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders with an interest in certification of persons and explains the benefits of accredited certification in realizing the objective above.





## OBJECTIVES

To describe the benefits associated with accreditation to ISO/IEC 17024 including benefits to certification bodies for persons, benefits to certified persons, benefits to the public, benefits to employers, and benefits to regulatory bodies and national authorities.

To describe the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders, including the International Accreditation Forum (IAF).

To dispel myths associated with accreditation to ISO/IEC 17024.

To explain the IAF Multilateral Recognition Arrangement (MLA) in relation to ISO/IEC 17024.

# Certification of Persons

Certification of persons is a form of credential generally awarded to many occupations, including professionals and skilled workers. It assures that the certified person has been evaluated and assessed by a neutral, third-party body and found to have the knowledge and skills to perform competently.

Initially established in the medical and other professions (think of a Board-Certified Surgeon or a Chartered Engineer), in more recent times, the proliferation of IT software and hardware has created an environment where the number of certifications has exponentially increased. Many people are aware of Microsoft certifications or Cisco certifications. Partially because there is now an awareness of certifications by both persons and the public, and partially because professional bodies and associations now see the value in offering certifications, certification of persons credentials are rapidly increasing in number.









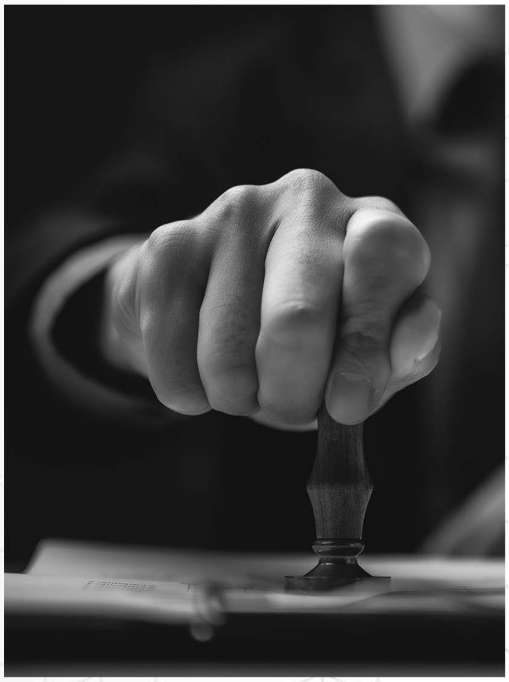


However, not all certifications of individuals are created equal. Sometimes bodies offering certification of persons believe they are offering credible certification but in fact, they may be offering some other type of credential. One of the key features of certification of persons, in addition to being third-party, is that there must be an assessment or verification of competence. Competence is defined in ISO/IEC 17024 as the "*ability to apply knowledge and skills to achieve intended results*", as opposed to qualification, which is defined as "*demonstrated education, training and work experience*". Therefore, organizations awarding a credential based on completion of education and/or training, or verification of work experience, are not offering certification. This is just one example of how organizations fail to award valid certification.



One way for a body to ensure it is offering a quality, valid certification of persons is to meet the requirements of ISO/IEC 17024. This standard contains the principles and requirements a certification body for persons should meet, including the development and maintenance of the scheme for persons. By meeting the requirements of ISO/IEC 17024, a body is more likely to be awarding a person certification that provides value to all stakeholders.





# Accreditation of Certification Bodies Certifying Persons

When a third-party body assesses a certification body for persons to ISO/IEC 17024, that body is called an accreditation body and the attestation it awards is called accreditation. Accreditation is defined in ISO/IEC 17000 as a "***third-party attestation related to a conformity assessment body, conveying formal demonstration of its competence, impartiality and consistent operation in performing specific conformity assessment activities***". In the case of ISO/IEC 17024, an accreditation body would assess a certification body for persons to evaluate its competence, impartiality and consistent operation in awarding the certification of persons as defined in the requirements of the standard. This provides confidence that the certification can be trusted.



## ISO/IEC 17024

Accreditation bodies may be members of the International Accreditation Forum and as a result, they may participate in agreements that recognize the accreditation awarded by other accreditation bodies (see MLA Section).

# Benefits of Accreditation of Certification of Personnel

## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BENEFIT OF ACCREDITATION:

Accreditation provides confidence that the certification body for persons is meeting the requirements of ISO/IEC 17024, is competent to certify people, and undertakes its work impartially.

Accreditation helps certification bodies for persons by providing constructive feedback for continual improvement for the credentialing program.

1SO/IEC 17024 contains best practice requirements that ensure a valid, reliable, and fair process of certification of persons. Accreditation assures the public and other stakeholders that the certification awarded by the certification body for persons demonstrates that the certified person is indeed competent and continues to be competent.

Accredited certification bodies often remark that simply preparing for and going through the accreditation process results in a better program with better documentation of more clearly articulated policies and procedures.

Related to continuing improvement is the idea that accreditation serves as a mark for quality performance.

Organizations offering certification of persons are often looking for performance indicators and evidence of the quality of their programs. Only by looking inward and conducting regular reviews can they identify opportunities to serve their stakeholders and establish themselves as a leader in their specific industry.

Accreditation also enables the certification body for persons to market their programs. It allows independent evaluation to determine that the best practice standards have been met.

Image improvement is often cited as another reason certification bodies for persons seek accreditation. Accreditation also supports that the process developed has been reviewed in detail before the certification is granted to the person.

Accreditation is seen as a marker of the maturity of a profession because there has been a review process developed to a national standard and professions use accreditation to signal to stakeholders that the profession "has arrived." Many organizations view the development of an accreditation program as achieving a pinnacle of professional evolution or maturation.

**Reduction in risk and legal liability is another benefit of accreditation**

Certification bodies face risks when attesting to the competence of individuals. While attesting to a person's competence does not guarantee that the person will always act competently, it does provide evidence that the person had the knowledge and skills to know what was appropriate behavior for given situations. When a certified person behaves incompetently, person certification bodies are at risk because they issued a credential attesting the person was competent. Accreditation reduces that risk because it provides evidence that the certification body was competent in awarding the certification to the person and followed best practices when determining the competence of the person. Accreditation has been known to assist certification bodies for persons in purchasing and retaining comprehensive liability insurance and has also helped certification bodies for persons better defend themselves against lawsuits.

# Benefits to certified persons



Persons seeking certification spend considerable resources obtaining the certification both in terms of time and costs. Often the certified person has invested in educational and training materials to study for the examination over a period of months with these education and training programs having a broad range of costs and various time requirements to complete the programs. The candidate trusts that the certification process will be one that is fair, valid and reliable and worthy of the amount of time and costs being expended to participate. Accreditation ensures that the candidate is **not wasting their time and money.** The candidate can have confidence that their certification they are seeking are in fact authentic and valued.

Under some circumstances, accredited certification is the only way that **a person can use a specific professional title.** Some regulatory bodies restrict use of a job title (think “Professional Engineer”) to a person who has obtained the credential. And often that credential is a certification awarded by an accredited and sometimes chartered professional body. This provides value to the certified person because it protects the use of the title to persons who have demonstrated competence by obtaining the certification. It is not meant to control the number of persons who enter a profession but is meant to ensure the public and other interested parties can have confidence in a person who holds the title.





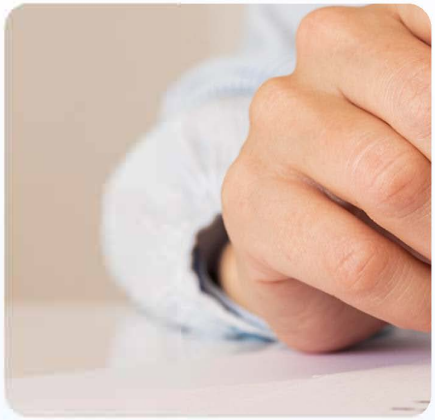
Accreditation ensures that the certification body follows practices that are fair to candidates and certified persons. This means that the process is **not biased** towards or against any persons.

Accreditation helps to ensure that the **certification process is valid and reliable.** Validity references the degree to which an examination and their examination items measure what they are intended to, while reliability refers to the consistency of an examination. Accreditation ensures that candidates are provided due process throughout the certification process and that concerns, complaints and appeals are handled by the certification body in a fair and expedient manner.



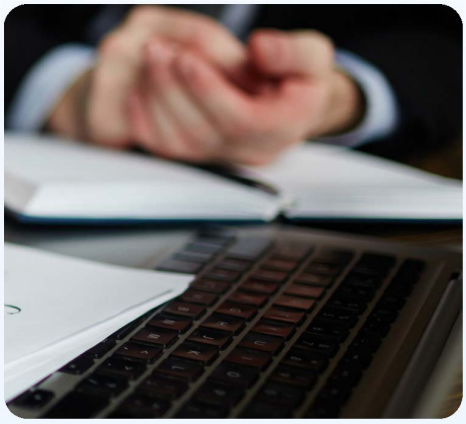
# Benefits to certified persons cont...

One assurance that accreditation provides a candidate is that the certification body they are seeking certification from is indeed an authentic certification body and has established itself as **a legal entity.** Additionally, accreditation bodies ensure that the certification body has the appropriate resources and would not likely be going out of business in the near term.



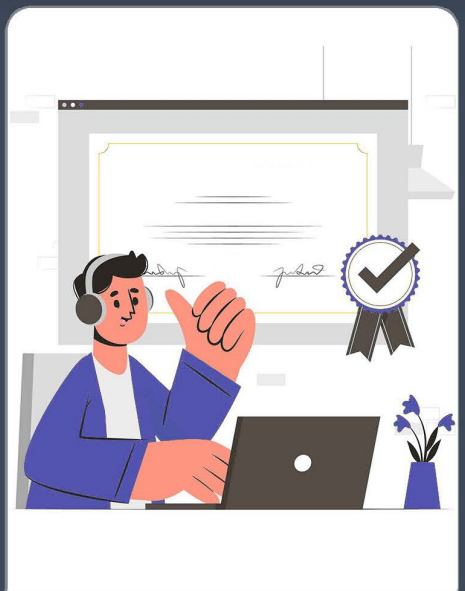




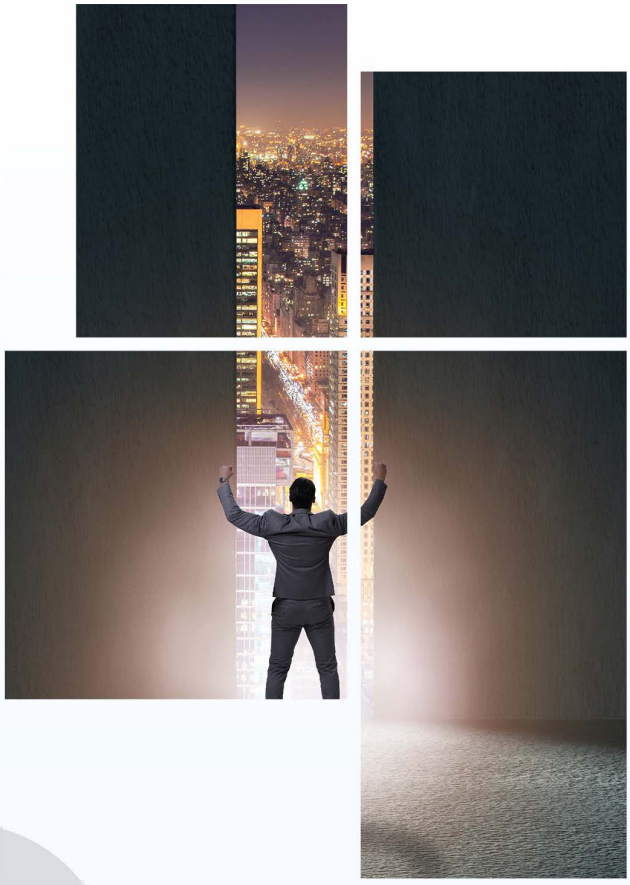


**Portability of a person certification credential** is another benefit of accredited certification. It contributes to improved portability of certification for persons within labor markets and education and across both. It also helps to create pathways and career ladders for workers.

Finally, a benefit to certified persons is the overall structure and purpose of IAF and the **potential for global recognition of the certification awarded.** Based on the IAF MLA, and the level of agreement, it is possible to facilitate cross border recognition of the certification awarded to a person by another certification body or the government of another country, thus speeding the process of obtaining a credential in another region. It may even be possible someday to have the certification of the person immediately recognized, enabling the person to work in another country without any additional qualifications or credentials.



# BENEFITS TO THE PUBLIC

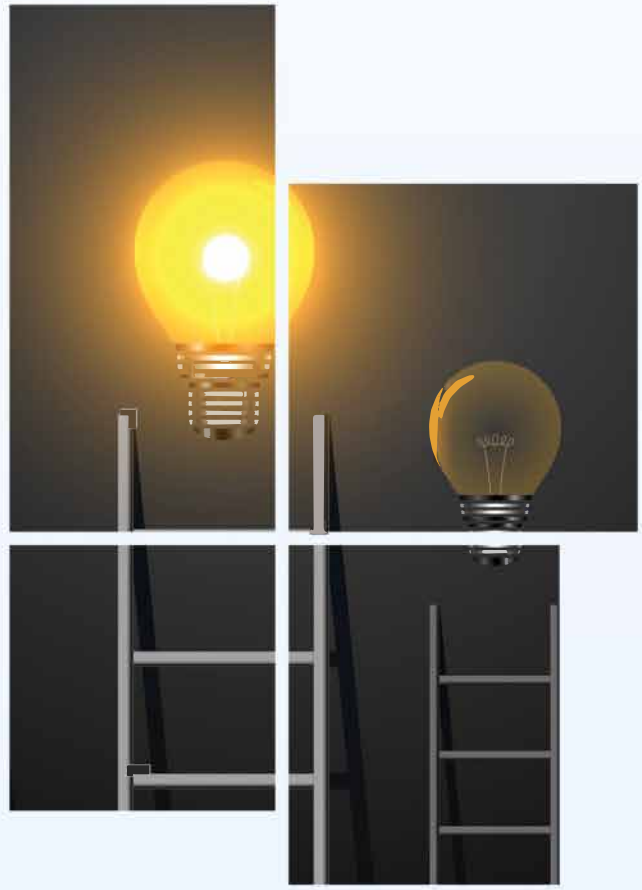


The public often does not have the expertise to judge the competence of a professional or worker. A benefit of accredited certification to the public is it **provides confidence to the public** that the person they are hiring or working with has been evaluated and found to have the knowledge and skills to function competently, thus protecting them.

Accredited certification also contributes to the **transparency of the certification** so that the public may have a better understanding of the value of the certification and the meaning behind the knowledge and skills the certification credentials confer. Accreditation bodies ensure that information regarding the scheme and the requirements for the scheme are publicly available.

Another benefit to the public is accredited certification **provides the public recourse** in the event they believe the person did something wrong and failed to address the issue. The public can reach out to the accredited certification body to file a complaint against the certified person, which should result in an investigation.

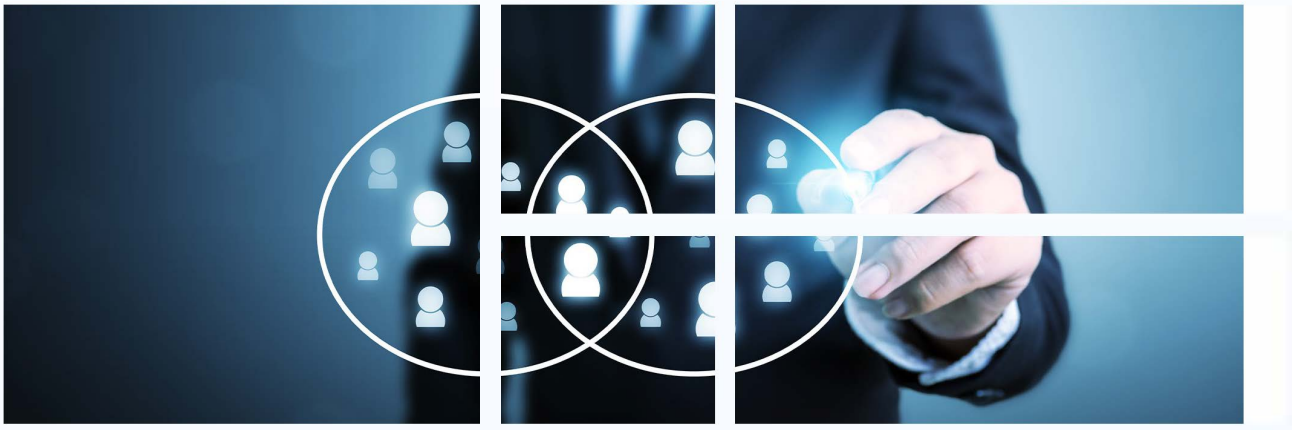
Accredited certification provides confidence to the public that any certified person they seek services from **has been evaluated for competence** regardless of which certified person they select. This allows the public to select professionals and services from workers based on other criteria such as location, price, and other qualities not related to competence.



# BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

While no certification for persons can replace employer evaluations of potential employees including a diligent interview, accredited certification can **assist employers in hiring decisions** by attesting to the knowledge and skills of a potential employee, something not easily accomplished during the hiring process. References and reports from prior employers are not always accurate in the information they provide regarding the competence and other qualities of a potential employee. But accredited certifications are accurate depictions of what a person knows and knows how to do. By requiring accredited certification of potential employees as a condition of hiring, employers can be assured of the competence and qualifications of the employee. This allows the employer to focus the job interview process on other qualities such as soft skills and personality traits.

With multi-national businesses working across borders in a flat global environment, the **ability to easily transport employees to other geographic regions** is increasingly important. Accredited certification helps to facilitate this because in many cases, other economies are more willing to accept workers who hold a credential attesting to their competence as workers in their regions. This is especially important when the fields of work are regulated. Moving an employee who works in a government regulated field to another region is facilitated if the employee holds an accredited certification and there is an accreditation body in the region who will accept the accredited certification.



Similarly, when a business moves to a new economy, locating skilled workers is often a consideration in determining where to relocate, particularly in manufacturing businesses. Accredited certification assists these businesses by providing a set of verified, competent workers. Businesses can make educated decisions regarding where to relocate based on the number of accredited certified persons who exist in the various regions with the knowledge and skills needed by the business. Developing economies can benefit by attracting new businesses because they can demonstrate that they **have the skilled and competent workforce to support these businesses.**



# BENEFITS TO REGULATORY BODIES AND NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

Governments, and the citizens they protect, are increasingly moving towards zero risk tolerance. Regulators are introducing stricter, and more comprehensive regulations and reporting requirements. In turn, businesses are required more and more to demonstrate legal and regulatory compliance. Most countries have rules and regulations related to safety and performance of various services. There are greater requirements regarding competent performance, from IT security to food safety to data privacy.

Accredited certification is used to assess conformity against a standard, a code of practice or regulatory requirements. Regulators can set overall policy requirements or detailed technical requirements and rely on accredited organizations to ensure compliance. Compliance is demonstrated by the award of a certificate or a mark. Regulators are increasingly relying on an independent third-party declaration of compliance to support regulatory enforcement and monitoring activities as they demonstrate compliance with legislation and performance against industry benchmarks and performance indicators for the competence of professionals and workers.



For regulatory bodies and national authorities, accredited certification **reduces risks and protects the health and welfare of consumers and the public** from incompetent performance by professionals and workers. This in turn increases public confidence.

Another benefit of accredited person certification is that government agencies **are more easily able to identify quality person certification credentials** to award financial aid. Some governments may support the attainment of a person certification credential to facilitate employment for specific classes of persons such as veterans returning to the workforce. Accreditation helps the regulatory agencies determine which person certifications are of value and should have the costs for obtaining these certifications covered.



Accredited certification for persons also allows regulatory bodies to **focus on other regulatory activities** such as inspections and regulatory laws and rules development rather than worrying about verifying the competence of its professionals and workers because the accreditation bodies are ensuring the certification bodies are verifying the competence of the workforce.

Use of IAF recognized accreditation also f**acilitates trade and economic growth.** The accreditation process relies on a uniform approach to determining certification body competence – an approach that has been accepted and implemented across many borders. The use of the IAF MLA mark can be viewed as equivalent. This reduces or eliminates the need for re-certification in another country.



# The IAF MLA for Certification of Persons

IAF is an organization of accreditation bodies and other interested stakeholders representing more than 100 economies. Most accreditation bodies operate under the authority of their own nation's government and cooperate in the development and maintenance of Multilateral Recognition Arrangements (MLAs). Signatories to the IAF MLA agree to promote acceptance of accredited certificates issued by all the other IAF MLA signatories within the scope of the MLA. Thus, the MLA underpins the recognition of ISO/IEC 17024 certificates issued by certification bodies accredited by IAF member accreditation bodies.

## Structure of the MLA

Certificates issued by bodies accredited by IAF MLA signatories can be relied upon throughout the world because the MLA assures the credibility of the certificate to customers.



**THE MLA IS STRUCTURED IN 5 LEVELS. ISO/IEC 17024 FITS INTO THESE LEVELS AS FOLLOWS:**

| | |
|---|---|
| LEVEL 01 | Includes ISO/IEC 17011 and specifies the criteria for the Accreditation Body. |
| LEVEL 02 | Describes the type of conformity assessment activity or accreditation activities in which the accreditation body has demonstrated competence to perform. In this case, it would be certification of persons. |
| LEVEL 03 | This is the IAF endorsed standard used by the accreditation body to assess the person certification body competence. In this case, it would be ISO/IEC 17024. |
| LEVEL 04 | The IAF endorsed sector specific requirements, which specify internationally recognized applications of the standard listed in level 3. These requirements are used by the accreditation body in combination with ISO/IEC 17024 to assess the person certification body. In this case, there are none so there is no level 4 MLA for persons. |
| LEVEL 05 | This level includes the IAF endorsed conformity assessment document used by the accredited certification body for persons |

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