

LATAK-D.007-12/01.2025

LATAK Policy for Participation in Proficiency Testing Programmes and Interlaboratory Comparisons

List of Contents

1. Objective	2
2. Introduction	2
3. Terminology and definitions	4
4. LATAK Policy for Participation in Proficiency Testing Programmes and Interlaboratory Comparisons	3
ANNEX	6
List of literature	10
Register of changes	11

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1. Objective

1.1. The State Agency “Latvian National Accreditation Bureau” (hereinafter – LATAK) takes into consideration the results of proficiency testing and interlaboratory comparisons (which are not proficiency tests) in the evaluation process, assessing the competence of the conformity assessment body (hereinafter – CAB) to perform sampling, testing, calibration, and medical examinations.

1.2. Participation in proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparisons (which are not proficiency tests), organised by competent providers is, for an accredited CAB, an integral part of the monitoring of the validity of its results.

1.3. It should be emphasised that participation in ILCs other than PT should only be envisaged when PTs are not available, and/or appropriate.

1.4. The results of proficiency testing and interlaboratory comparisons (which are not proficiency tests) are used to assess the competence of CAB that wish to complete accreditation for conformity with requirements of standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17025 or LVS EN ISO 15189. Proficiency tests, if available and justified, can be used by inspection bodies of some separate types (LVS EN ISO/IEC 17020), if such testing or calibration activities are included that directly influence and determine the inspection results, or it is determined by regulatory enactments. However, it is recognised that proficiency tests are not a common and expected element in the accreditation process of majority of inspection bodies.

2. Introduction

2.1. This document defines the requirements and gives instructions on proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparison activities of CAB in the process of accreditation of testing, sampling, calibration and medical field and, where essential, inspection field.

2.2. The standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17025 specifies the requirements for monitoring of results credibility, incl. CAB shall monitor its performance compared to results of other laboratories, where it is available and appropriate. Such monitoring shall be planned and revised, and it shall include, to one or both of the activities stated below:

- a) participation in proficiency testing;
- b) participation in interlaboratory comparisons, which are not proficiency tests.

2.3. The standard LVS EN ISO 15189 defines the requirements for quality assurance of investigation results, incl. for participation in interlaboratory comparison programmes. In standard ISO 15189:2022, the term “proficiency tests” (PT) has been replaced by term “external quality assessment” (EQA).

2.4. The standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17011 imposes an obligation on accreditation bodies to consider in the decision-making process participation of CAB and their performance in proficiency testing.

3. Terminology and definitions

3.1. **Proficiency testing** evaluation of participant performance against pre-established criteria by means of interlaboratory comparisons (according to LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043).

3.2. **Proficiency testing schemes** proficiency testing designed and operated in one or more proficiency testing rounds for a specified area of measurement, testing, calibration, examination, sampling or inspection (according to LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043).

3.3. **Interlaboratory comparison** design, performance and evaluation of measurements or tests on the same or similar items by two or more laboratories in accordance with predetermined conditions (according to LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043).

3.4. CRM

Certified reference material

A reference material characterised by a metrologically valid procedure concerning one or several parameters and a reference material certificate issued for this procedure, where values of the respective parameters, associated uncertainty and a declaration on metrological traceability (according to ISO/IEC 17034) are indicated.

3.5. SIC

Small interlaboratory comparison (according to EA-4/21 INF).

4. LATAK Policy for Participation in Proficiency Testing Programmes and Interlaboratory Comparisons

4.1. All accredited CABs in testing, sampling, calibration and medical examinations field and, where applicable, inspection field, have to participate in proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparisons, where these procedures are available and appropriate, and are related to the accreditation scope. Inspection bodies that perform measurements, shall ensure conformity to relevant requirements of the standard ISO/IEC 17025. Consequently, requirements of this document shall apply also to this type of inspections.

4.2. CABs shall elaborate a plan for participation in proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparisons for the entire accreditation cycle according to the accreditation scope. CABs shall determine the level and frequency of participation after careful analysis of other results credibility assurance measures and risk assessment. The following aspects may be considered in the risk assessment:

- a) volume of performed measurements;
- b) turnover of the technical personnel;
- c) experience and knowledge of the technical personnel;
- d) ensuring of metrological traceability of measurements;
- e) known stability / instability of methods;
- f) significance and end use of measurement data, etc.

NOTE 1. Periodicity of participation is usually determined for proficiency testing schemes.

4.3. CAB have to be ready to substantiate their policy and action regarding participation and any non-participation in proficiency testing schemes and/or interlaboratory comparisons.

4.3.¹ There are areas in which participation in proficiency tests can be difficult due to the lack of technical characteristics of measurements, PP schemes, small number of laboratories, innovative technologies, etc. for reasons. In certain cases, skill tests or inter-laboratory comparisons are possible only in separate measurement parts. In these cases, the most important thing is to provide adequate control measures for the reliability of the results.

4.4. The CAB can choose proficiency testing schemes or their organizers that are most suitable for its operation (accreditation scope), unless specified otherwise. CAB shall use accredited organizers of proficiency testing, if such offers are available.

NOTE 2. Standards LVS EN ISO/IEC 17025 and LVS EN ISO 15189 impose an obligation on the laboratory to assess service providers. The standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043 gives recommendations and directions on requirements for organizers of proficiency testing.

NOTE Information on proficiency testing schemes is available in EPTIS (supported by European Commission, European Accreditation Cooperation (hereinafter – EA), Eurolab, Eurachem) database <https://www.eptis.org/> Information on proficiency testing schemes is also available on the website of LATAK <https://www.latak.gov.lv/lv/prasmes-parbauzu-organizetajiem>.

4.5. Ideally, laboratories have to participate in proficiency testing with each parameter to be determined and at each tested/ calibrated object. However, not in all cases it is possible both logistically, and economically. Therefore, CABs have to determine the areas of technical competence, which include the measuring process, sets of parameters and products, where the result of proficiency testing of one of these sets can be directly correlated to other sets of measuring processes, parameters and products.

4.6. Various technical competences usually can be identified by a necessity for different qualifications, training, experience and use of various equipment. One group of technical competences may combine, for example, measuring methods, parameters to be determined, equivalent objects to be tested/ calibrated.

4.7. In addition to the assessment of suitability of the level determined by CAB, LATAK also carries out assessment of suitability of “frequency” of participation of laboratories in proficiency testing, based on the risk level.

4.8. CAB shall elaborate proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparison participation plan, which arises from determining various “levels” and “frequency” of participation, and which covers at least one accreditation cycle (period until full repeated assessment). The suitability of the elaborated plan to the general proficiency testing strategy shall be revised at least once a year during the management review.

4.9. The requirement of LATAK regarding participation of CAB in proficiency testing schemes and interlaboratory comparisons is:

- a) for each method of testing, calibration and medical examinations before granting accreditation or expanding the scope (except in cases specified in 3.3¹);
- b) in testing, calibration, at least one participation for each method during the accreditation cycle (except in the cases indicated in 4.3¹, as well as, if necessary, taking into account the aspects indicated in point 4.5, presenting to LATAK the evaluation performed and the justification of the drawn up plan).

4.10. In areas of higher risk level, for example, environment and health protection areas, as well as areas with insufficient provision of certified reference materials, more frequent participation in proficiency testing schemes and interlaboratory comparisons is required. For specific requirements in the field of medical examinations, see document LATAK-D.15189 “Medical Laboratory Accreditation Scheme”.

4.11. The frequency of participation of laboratory in proficiency testing schemes may be determined by professional organizations and regulatory bodies.

4.12. More detailed information on the level and frequency of participation in proficiency testing, as well as examples divided into areas (chemical testing of environmental parameters, microbiological testing, clinical examinations, physical testing, calibration and matrix approach in clinical chemistry) are given in the EA document EA-4/18 INF “Guidance on the level and frequency of proficiency testing participation”.

4.13. LATAK assesses participation of laboratories in non-accredited interlaboratory comparisons according to the EA document EA-4/21 INF “Guidelines for the assessment of the appropriateness of small interlaboratory comparisons within the process of laboratory accreditation”. See [ANNEX Organisation and Assessment of Results of Small Interlaboratory Comparisons](#) to this document.

4.14. The CAB shall assess own performance in the respective proficiency testing programme and/or interlaboratory comparison, and in case of unsatisfactory or questionable results shall carry out corrective measures, documenting them appropriately.

4.15. Before the regular assessment procedure, CAB submit to LATAK a report on participation in proficiency testing programmes and/or interlaboratory comparisons – LATAK form F.045 “Overview of participation in proficiency testing (external) or interlaboratory comparison”.

Organisation and Assessment of Results of Small Interlaboratory Comparisons

Small interlaboratory comparisons (hereinafter – SIC) are organised among a few laboratories (mostly, 2 - 4, max 7, including organizers).

SIC may be organised also among various laboratories of one organization, ensuring that the tested object is not known to any of the participants.

The organizer of SIC shall apply the respective requirements of the standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043, if the results and their assessment are used for quality assessment of the results of obtained measurements.

By the number of participants decreasing, it is increasingly more difficult to identify the distribution of results in order to credibly determine deviations or apply a stable (credible) statistical analysis. It is not recommended to obtain the assigned value and standard deviation from results obtained from the results of participants, or it shall be done very carefully and competently.

There are three possible scenarios for correct assessment of SIC results, and application of the respective scenario depends on:

- existence and credibility of externally assigned value,
- quality of the data set,
- experience of participants,
- competence and experience of the organizer of SIC.

Scenario 1: the organizer uses the assigned value, based on the external reference

The assigned value can arise from the respective reference, for example:

- certificate of certified reference material,
- instrument calibration certificate,
- measurements performed by an expert laboratory,
- previous PT results for the same or similar material.

Also a standard deviation may be an externally determined value, which is obtained from the results of previous PT or corresponds to specific testing performance requirements.

In the Scenario 1, the organizer of SIC may use for assessment of performance of participants:

- **z criterion**, where the assigned value and standard deviation is independent from the reported results,
- **En criterion**, if uncertainty is indicated for an assigned value and reported value,
- also **zeta (ξ) criterion** may be used – it includes uncertainty of the results of participants and the assigned value, recommended in combination with z criterion.

Scenario 2: the organizer uses the assigned value, based on the results of participants

If the external reference value is not available, quantitative analysis and performance assessment only on a basis of the results notified by participants is not recommended. However, there can be exceptions, for example:

- Participants are experienced laboratories competent to coordinate their testing accuracy for the specific type of measurements, for example, with interlaboratory comparison results of the same or similar type obtained previously.
- One of the participants operates at a higher metrological level (lower measuring uncertainty), using reference methodology and more progressive equipment. The result of measurements performed by this participant may be used as the assigned value.

Scenario 3: the organizer does not use the assigned value

If the external assigned value is not available or the assigned value cannot be credibly calculated from the data set, the organizer of SIC cannot calculate performance indicators; however, the individual performance of participants can be assessed. The results can be displayed in schematic form and can be discussed among the participants.

The data to be used in the assessment of individual performance:

- reproducibility of the results (variations among the participants);
- repeatability (variations among repeated measurements in one laboratory under the same conditions);
- type of distribution;
- information on the extreme values (deviations or not);
- uncertainty of measurements notified by the participants.

While assessing participation of laboratories in SIC, LATAK takes into consideration, whether:

- the assessed laboratory is the organizer and participant of SIC (assesses the plan and report);
- the assessed laboratory is only a participant of SIC (the laboratory shall be able to give an explanation/evaluation of suitability of the respective SIC).

It is recommended that the organisation of SIC is included in the quality management system of the laboratory.

Documents and protocols concerning the organisation of SIC shall be maintained in accordance with the quality management system.

The organisation of SIC or participation in the process shall be considered cooperation among laboratories, not as a service provided to a customer. Therefore, requirements related to customer service, as well as complaints and appeals, do not apply.

The organisation of SIC shall be included in internal audits and management reviews.

The personnel involved in the organisation of SIC shall be authorised and its competence shall be assessed.

If the organizer participates also as a participant, the personnel that performs measurements, if possible, should not be involved in the organisation process, and also precautionary measures shall be implemented in order to prevent disclosure of the measured parameter.

The organizer of SIC shall elaborate an interlaboratory comparison plan and include in it at least the following details:

- the organizer and its contact person;
- clearly defined goal and participation criteria;
- characteristics to be determined (object, in the field of calibration – e.g., range, measured variable, in the field of testing – e.g., range, to be determined);
- requirements regarding the preparation, storage, transfer/receipt, use of the proficiency test object;
- timetable;
- information on used methods;
- results evaluation criteria – description of comparability evaluation method, statistical analysis methods of data analysis, if applicable;
- a description of the format for reporting results (eg result with/without uncertainty)..

SIC test object

- if prepared by the organizer of SIC – the object shall be assessed, if delivered externally, conformity assessment shall be performed (for example, certificates);
- homogeneity and stability shall be assessed and documented, if it is essential for assessment of results.

Assessment of results

- suitability of the statistical method of assessment of results shall be assessed;
- it shall be ensured that an adequate value is assigned and uncertainty of measurements related to this value is defined and is considered as possibly “confidential”;
- it shall be verified that a standard deviation (SDPA) appropriate for the target needs is determined.

Additional information on the statistical methods used for small data sets is available in standard ISO 13528 “Statistical methods for use in proficiency testing in interlaboratory comparisons”.

The methods or procedures used by participants shall be documented and, if they differ and it is permissible, this information shall be used in the performance assessment.

Implementation of SIC

Instructions for the participants of SIC shall be documented and be available to them.

Additional conditions for processing, packaging, marking, distribution and storage of SIC test object shall be considered, informing the participants, especially if differences from the routine testing exist.

The organizer of SIC shall prepare a report, including at least the following information:

- date;
- the organizer and its contact person;
- participants;
- identification of methods used by participants;
- exact description of the object, assigned value, uncertainty, including the necessary information about its preparation, homogeneity, stability, etc.;
- participants' results;
- comparability of results/performance.

If certain parts of information are detailed in SIC plan and have been received by all participants, this information can be skipped in the report.

List of literature

1. LVS EN ISO/IEC 17025:2017 “General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories (ISO 17025:2017)”
2. LVS EN ISO 15189:2023 “Medical laboratories - Requirements for quality and competence (ISO 15189:2022)”
3. LVS EN ISO/IEC 17011:2021 “Conformity assessment - Requirements for accreditation bodies accrediting conformity assessment bodies (ISO/IEC 17011:2017)”
4. LVS EN ISO/IEC 17043:2023 “Conformity assessment - General requirements for the competence of proficiency testing providers (ISO/IEC 17043:2023)”
5. LVS ISO 17034:2017 “General requirements for the competence of producers of reference materials (ISO 17034:2016)”
6. ILAC P9:01/2024 “ILAC Policy for Proficiency Testing and/or Interlaboratory comparisons other than Proficiency Testing”
7. EA-4/18 G:2021 “Guidance on the level and frequency of proficiency testing participation”
8. EA-4/21 INF:2018 “Guidelines for the assessment of the appropriateness of small interlaboratory comparisons within the process of laboratory accreditation”
9. ISO 13528:2022 “Statistical methods for use in proficiency testing by interlaboratory comparison”
10. LATAK scheme LATAK-D.15189:2023-M/02/10.2024 “Accreditation scheme for conformity assessment of medical laboratories”

Register of changes

Version	Content of changes	Date
10	Structurally changed, putting more accent on PT planning (level and frequency)	14.07.2021
	The section of definitions is supplemented with CRM, SIC, PT programme	
	Updated information regarding the new version of standard LVS EN ISO/IEC 17025:2017	
	Supplemented with ANNEX Organisation and Assessment of Results of Small Interlaboratory Comparisons	
11	Chapter 1 is supplemented with the text of ISO 15189:2022, the term "proficiency tests" (PP) is replaced by "external quality assessment" (EQA)	15.03.2024.
	Updated Chapter 2 "Terms and definitions"	
	Added point 3.6 in testing, calibration	
	It is excluded that LATAK coordinates and distributes information on proficiency testing programs and inter-laboratory comparison to conformity assessment institutions	
	An updated list of literature	
12	In the section "Purpose" detailed requirements for participation in proficiency testing and/or interlaboratory comparisons, in this context the text has been supplemented with "and/or" The list of areas has been supplemented with the text "sampling"	14.01.2025.
	Structural changes and paragraph numbering included	
	Included reference to LATAK-D.15189 "Medical Laboratory Accreditation Scheme"	