

By Laura Nagaba

The East African Community (EAC) last week unveiled the 2026 EAC Regional Quality Awards in a move aimed at recognising enterprises setting the benchmark for quality, innovation and standards compliance across East Africa.

QUALITY

The awards are expected to promote a strong culture of quality among East African enterprises, enhance the competitiveness of locally produced goods and services, facilitate regional trade, and support deeper regional integration.

The initiative also aims to encourage the adoption of internationally recognised standards, strengthen innovation and improve market access for businesses across the region.

The announcement was made during the 28th meeting of the East African Standards

EAC launches 2026 Regional Quality Awards for SMEs

Committee (EASC) held in Arusha, Tanzania.

PARTICIPATION

Speaking during the event, EAC director of customs and acting director of trade, Flavia Busingye, called on enterprises across all EAC partner states, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to participate in the 2026 awards cycle and showcase their commitment to quality and excellence.

Busingye underlined the important role of the private sector in driving quality improvement and regional competitiveness and stressed the need for inclusivity in the awards process.

"We want to encourage greater participation of the private sector in the awards process. We trust that the next phases will be more inclusive,



Busingye

especially for SMEs, women-led enterprises and emerging businesses, so that no one is left behind," she said.

Busingye commended Kenya for successfully hosting the 2025 awards cycle in Nairobi, which attracted participation from 252 organisations and drew an audience of more than 3,000 people, with

25 organisations receiving recognition at the regional level.

"The 2026 awards cycle aims to raise the bar for quality excellence across East Africa, including among SMEs, while promoting innovation, competitiveness and consumer confidence in East African products and services," she said.

The EAC Regional Quality Awards are implemented under the EAC Regional Quality Awards Framework, approved by the East African Standards Committee in 2022.

The awards recognise outstanding achievements by enterprises in both the manufacturing and service sectors across the region.

Following the success of the 2025 awards, the 2026 EAC Regional Quality Awards will feature four main categories

which include EAC Product of the Year Award, EAC Company of the Year Award, EAC Service Awards and EAC Exporter Awards for the Agri-Processing Sector. Each category will include both large enterprises and small and medium enterprises.

The awards process will be conducted in two stages. National competitions will first be co-ordinated by national standards bodies in collaboration with private sector stakeholders and relevant partners. National winners will then advance to the regional competition co-ordinated by the EAC secretariat.

The timeline for the 2026 awards began with the launch of national competitions in April 2026, followed by submission of entries at the national level by June 30 2026.

Selection of national winners and submission for the regional competition will both be completed by August 30 2026, while regional winners will be selected by September 30 2026 ahead of the regional awards ceremony in Kigali, Rwanda, in October 2026.

The EAC has urged enterprises across all partner states to take advantage of the awards platform to strengthen quality standards, improve competitiveness and expand access to regional and international markets.

The project is supported by the European Union through the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme, and implemented by the International Trade Centre, in collaboration with regional and national stakeholders, including the East African Business Council.