



International Council  
for Ad Self-Regulation

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# GLOBAL FACTBOOK

OF ADVERTISING  
SELF-REGULATORY  
ORGANIZATIONS

A background image featuring a globe in the center, surrounded by a field of binary code (0s and 1s) in various shades of gray and white, creating a digital or data-driven aesthetic.

2018

[WWW.ICAS.GLOBAL](http://WWW.ICAS.GLOBAL)

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## Introduction

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The Global Factbook of Advertising Self-Regulatory Organizations (“Global SRO Factbook”) is a yearly publication of the International Council for Advertising Self-Regulation (ICAS). This second edition presents **basic facts and figures on the Self-Regulatory Organizations (SROs)** belonging to the ICAS network for the calendar year 2018.

It complements the **Global SRO Database**, an online tool available on the ICAS website at: <https://icas.global/srodatabase>. Based on a common methodology, the Global SRO Database aims to provide transparency on the way SROs operate. The data it contains is standardized as much as possible to allow for a high level comparison between different markets around the world.

The **Global SRO Factbook**, on the other hand, provides an aggregate overview of the facts and figures contained in the Database. It contains useful background explanations highlighting some local specificities, while putting them in a broader international context.

Both these tools intend to shed some light on the work carried out by SROs in their respective markets while facilitating the sharing of knowledge on different aspects of self-regulatory systems. The explanations provided in the Factbook should be understood in that context, keeping in mind that there is no such thing as the ‘best way’ to operate a self-regulatory system for advertising. Differences in language, cultural sensitivities, business practices and legal traditions mean that a single model would be unlikely to achieve effective outcomes in all the markets covered by the ICAS membership.

On the opposite, effective self-regulation requires the development of solutions tailored to local specificities - which doesn’t prevent individual markets from learning from the experiences of one another. As a result, the description of certain practices in this Factbook, included where adopted by a majority of SROs, should not be interpreted as a recommendation of ICAS. These practices should rather be seen as possible tools to achieve more responsible advertising - tools that constantly need to be assessed and adjusted to ensure that they meet the needs of the market, and of society as a whole.

# 1. Self-Regulatory Organizations

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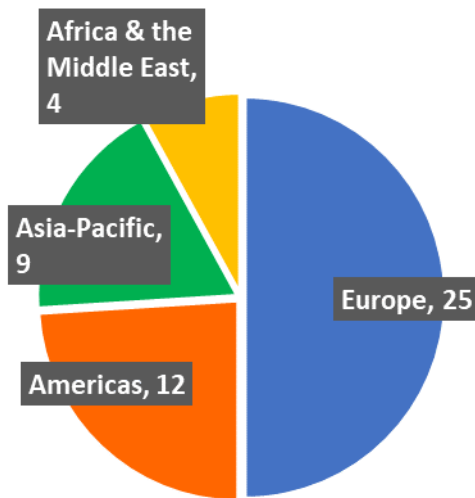
## A. Market coverage of Advertising Self-Regulation

SROs are independent bodies set up by the advertising industry to apply standards aimed at ensuring that advertisements are responsible from an ethical point of view. Today, ICAS estimates that there are at least **50 advertising SROs around the world** (see the full list in Annex)<sup>1</sup>. Among these, around half are already direct members in the ICAS network, with some European SROs being indirect members via the European Advertising Standards Alliance (EASA), ICAS’ sister organization in Europe. ICAS members include the largest and oldest SROs in the world such as those in France, the UK, Spain, the USA or Canada.

**Europe is the continent counting the highest number of SROs** (50%), followed by America (24%) and Asia-Pacific (18%). In Africa and the Middle East, there are currently only 4 functioning SROs (8%).<sup>2</sup>

In several markets, including major markets like China and Russia, efforts are currently under way to establish fully-fledged independent SROs. ICAS and EASA work closely with these markets to support the promotion of advertising self-regulation.

**Chart 1. Geographical spread of established SROs**



Unless otherwise specified, the facts and figures provided later in this Factbook cover 23 of the 24 SRO members of ICAS (The new SRO in Colombia is still in the process of being established).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this report, countries where more than one organization performs the functions of an SRO are only counted once.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of Chart 1, Turkey is counted as part of the Africa & Middle East region, despite also being part of Asia and Europe.

<sup>3</sup> See list in Annex.

## B. History and governance

ARPP in France is the oldest SRO in the world. It was founded in 1935. The Canadian SRO was created in the 1950s, with four SROs following in the 1960s (in the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, and El Salvador). The trend then accelerated in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Among the most recent SROs, two were created in 2018:

- The Advertising Regulatory Board (ARB) in South Africa was established in November 2018 following the closure of the former SRO. The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) of South Africa had been created in the 1950s;
- In Colombia, the Comisión Colombiana de Autorregulación de la Comunicación Comercial (CCACC) was launched in 2018 to replace the former Comisión Nacional de Autorregulación Publicitaria (CONARP), which was itself created in the 1980s.

SROs are typically created by representatives of the advertising industry committed to promoting self-regulatory standards. The organizational set-up of SROs however varies greatly from market to market. Statutes or Articles of Incorporation, as well as Annual Activity Reports, where available, can be accessed in the [Global SRO Database](#).

To support their governing bodies and provide services to the market (industry players, consumers and/or public authorities), SROs usually have permanent staff. The size of the Secretariat however varies greatly from market to market, depending on the financial resources of the SRO and on the scope of the services provided. The smallest SROs are operated by volunteers from the industry or by a single staff member. In fact, **more than half of ICAS SRO members (63%) count less than 10 employees**. Only two SROs employ more than 50 staff members: AUTOCONTROL in Spain and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the UK, with slightly more than 90 and 110 employees respectively.

Half of ICAS members operate with an annual budget of less than USD 1 million, and only 3 SROs have annual expenses above USD 5 million.

### C. SRO funding models

Overall, SROs can be grouped into three main categories in terms of how their activities are financed. Looking both at ICAS members and non-ICAS members:

1. The vast majority of SROs worldwide (32 markets, both within and outside ICAS) are primarily financed by **membership fees**. In this model, annual contributions from member firms and/or associations representing the advertising industry are used to finance the activities of the SRO. Membership fees can take the form of a fixed amount or of proportional fees based on a sliding scale (with larger members paying a higher fee than smaller members). There are also sometimes different levels of membership fees depending on the type of businesses members represent, and/or depending on the type of services provided.
2. Six markets use a **levy system**. This means that a small percentage of advertising costs goes to finance the operation of the SRO. This amount is typically collected by advertising agencies which act as intermediaries between advertisers and media owners (TV, radio, billboard sites, newspapers, websites...) before it is transferred to the SRO.
3. The remaining SROs (10 markets) use **other models**, which are either based on services fees, or on a combination of the membership and levy systems.

More information on SRO funding models can be found in the ICAS Note [How are Self-Regulatory Organizations financed?](#) published on 1 October 2018.

## 2. The Self-Regulatory System

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### A. Advertising Standards

The existence of a Self-Regulatory Code of Standards or a set of Guiding Principles governing the content of ads is typically a pre-requisite for establishing a Self-Regulatory System. Most self-regulatory standards and programs incorporate the basic principles that:

- All ads should be prepared with a due sense of social responsibility, notably in terms of being legal, decent, honest and truthful;
- All ads should conform to the principle of fair competition, as generally accepted in business, and consistent with competition laws;
- No ad should impair public confidence in advertising.

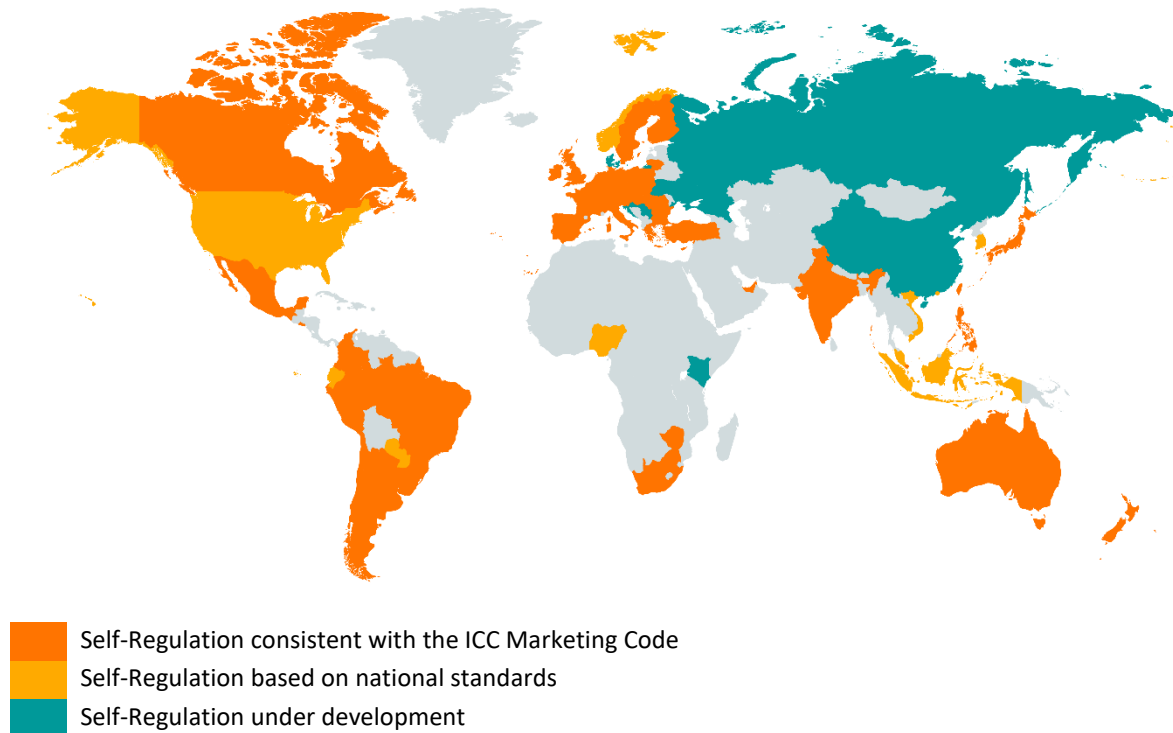
In most countries, local advertising standards are based on the [Advertising and Marketing Communications Code](#) of the International Chamber of Commerce (thereafter “ICC Marketing Code”). National adaptations are however often necessary to take into account legal, social, cultural and economic specificities.

Among ICAS markets:

- 2 markets, Belgium and Sweden, use the ICC Marketing Code in its original version, having translated it into the local language(s);
- 1 market, the United States, implements self-regulatory standards which were developed independently of the ICC Marketing Code;
- The remaining markets use national self-regulatory standards which are at least in part inspired by the ICC Marketing Code.

Specific provisions contained in local standards are typically agreed upon by an independent standards-making body within the SRO, and subsequently updated on a regular basis. The main Code or Standards are also often complemented by sectoral guidelines addressing the marketing of specific products or services (e.g. alcohol, beauty products...) or by issue-specific guidelines (e.g. on interest-based advertising, on advertising to children, on influencer marketing...).

**Chart 2. Use of the ICC Marketing Code worldwide**



*Source: ICAS and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), June 2019.*

## **B. Scope of Self-Regulation**

When assessing whether an ad is compliant with applicable self-regulatory standards, SROs use slightly different criteria depending on their mandate and scope of activities. Most of them work to ensure that ads are legal, decent, honest, truthful, socially responsible and/or fair. More and more SROs also assess ads in terms of their respect for consumers’ privacy and data protection rules. Other criteria not listed in Table 1 may also be used by some SROs such as whether ads comply with the principle of environmental responsibility or with the protection of children’s rights.



**Table 1. Criteria used to assess whether an ad is compliant with local standards**

Criterion	% of ICAS markets where the SRO assesses ads against this criterion
<b>Legality:</b> whether an ad is compliant with applicable laws	<b>91%</b> (all except Ireland and the US)
<b>Decency:</b> whether an ad is not offending standards of decency prevailing in the local culture	<b>95%</b> (all except the US)
<b>Honesty:</b> whether an ad is not abusing the trust of consumers or exploiting their lack of experience or knowledge	<b>95%</b> (all except Australia)
<b>Truthfulness:</b> whether an ad is not including content that could mislead customers (e.g. as regards the actual benefits/characteristics of the product or service)	<b>100%</b>
<b>(Social) responsibility:</b> whether an ad respects human dignity and is free of any form of discrimination, including that based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation	<b>95%</b> (all except the US)
<b>Fairness:</b> ensuring that an ad is not derogatory to the competition and is free of plagiarism	<b>91%</b> (all except Belgium <sup>4</sup> and South Africa)
<b>Right to privacy:</b> ensuring that an ad complies with (self)-regulatory standards on data protection for consumers	<b>70%</b> (all except Australia, Belgium, El Salvador, India, Mexico and Peru)

### C. Complaints-handling body

SROs may intervene before an ad is published or after an ad is published. All SROs offer a mechanism of some sort to handle complaints from consumers and/or competitors (see section 3.B). In most cases, these complaints are examined by an independent body within the SRO, often called the Jury or Complaints Committee. Separate from the standards-making body, the Jury is in charge of determining whether an individual ad is in breach of self-regulatory standards.

- **In the vast majority of cases (72%), all eligible consumer and/or competitor complaints are examined by the Jury.** The SRO staff may prepare the decisions of the Jury or filter some complaints which are out of scope, but all decisions on individual ads are adopted by the Jury;
- **In four cases (Canada, Italy, Sweden and the UK), some decisions on individual ads may be adopted by the SRO Secretariat.** The most complex cases or cases without a clear precedent are however always assessed by the Jury;
- **In three cases (the US, South Africa and El Salvador), all first level decisions on individual complaints are adopted by the SRO rather than by a Jury.** That said, in the US and South Africa, a Jury can be convened to examine first level decisions when these are appealed.

<sup>4</sup> Because JEP in Belgium does not deal with competitors' complaints, the principle of fair competition is rarely invoked in the complaints received by the Jury. This does not mean however that JEP cannot use the fairness criterion in its assessment of ads.

The size and composition of the Jury varies from market to market. In small markets, the Jury is often composed of less than 10 members whereas in large markets, Jury members may be recruited from a pool of more than 100 individuals. Since Jury members are often independent professionals acting on a voluntary basis, the individuals taking part in Jury meetings are not necessarily the same from one meeting to the other.

Jury members typically include individuals with an experience of the advertising industry but, in many markets, a significant percentage or even a majority of Jury members are independent lay experts or people representing interests other than those of the industry such as academics, retired judges or consumer advocates.

- **In 6 markets, all Jury members are independent from the advertising sector** (Australia, France, Italy, Peru, Portugal and Spain);
- **In 7 markets, half or more than half of Jury members are independent** from the advertising sector (Belgium, India, Ireland, New Zealand, Romania, U.A.E., the UK);
- **In the remaining markets, advertising industry professionals represent a majority** in the pool of Jury members, but independent experts, lawyers and representatives of civil society organizations are often also involved in Jury decisions.

### 3. SRO Services

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#### A. Advisory services

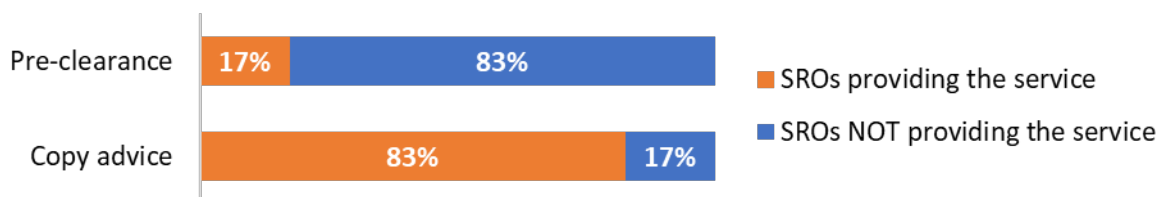
For the purpose of this report, we use the term “advisory services” to describe those services provided by SROs to advertisers and their agents prior to the publication of an ad. Such services can be divided into two main categories:

- **Pre-clearance**, whereby an ad must be assessed by the SRO as a compulsory pre-condition before it can be published. The obligation, where it exists, often covers specific media such as TV or radio, or particularly sensitive sectors such as drugs and medical devices, ads directed at children, or ads for financial services;
- **Copy advice**, where the SRO issues an opinion as to whether an ad complies with advertising standards prior to the publication of the ad, at the request of the advertiser, agencies, or the media. The advice is provided on a confidential basis and is usually non-binding. It may include suggestions of amendments to ensure compliance with the rules. Copy advice can be a free service or a paid service, depending on the market and the type of ad/advertiser.

**Pre-clearance is only provided by SROs in four markets** covered by ICAS’ membership: Canada, France, the Philippines and Italy. The Advertising Standards Council (ASC) in the Philippines is the SRO processing the highest number of pre-clearance requests every year, with more than 34,400 opinions issued in 2018, most of which within the next business day.

**Copy advice, on the other hand, is a service frequently offered by SROs.** 80% of ICAS members provide copy advice services. The three largest SROs process more than 5,000 requests per year. Spain is the SRO processing highest number of copy advice requests every year, with more than 33,300 opinions issued in 2018. In the majority of cases, copy advice is provided within 48 hours, and some SROs even offer an express service of same-day response.

**Chart 3. SROs’ advisory services**

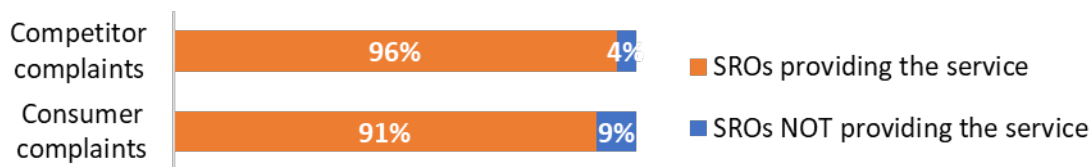


## B. Complaints

One of the main benefits of advertising self-regulation worldwide is that it provides a cheap (typically cost-free), fast and efficient solution to address consumer complaints about individual ads. Among ICAS members, **only 2 SROs currently do not handle consumer complaints** (in the U.A.E and the USA). In the US, this is because consumer complaints are handled by a different body with the Better Business Bureau (BBB) National Programs.<sup>5</sup>

**All SROs except one<sup>6</sup> handle competitor complaints.** The process for handling competitor complaints is usually broadly similar to that in place for handling consumer complaints, except that, unlike consumers, companies are often required to pay a fee to file a complaint. Moreover, in some countries, special public hearings are organized to debate cases filed by competitors.

**Chart 4. SROs' complaints-handling service**



The number of consumer complaints handled by SROs varies from market to market and from one year to the other. If we consider the 21 ICAS members offering the service, the average number of complaints processed in 2018 was about 2,600. There are however major differences in practice:

- 5 SROs handled fewer than 20 consumer complaints;
- 2 SROs handled between 100 and 250 consumer complaints;
- 3 SROs handled between 500 and 1,000 consumer complaints;
- 6 SROs handled between 1,000 and 4,000 consumer complaints;
- 2 SROs handled more than 5,000 consumer complaints.

The ASA in the UK is the SRO handling the highest number of consumer complaints per year: more than 33,000 in 2018.<sup>7</sup>

The number of competitor complaints handled by SROs also varies from market to market but is understandably often lower than the number of consumer complaints. The 21 ICAS members which

<sup>5</sup> ICAS's member, BBB NP (still known as the ASRC in 2018), handles competitor complaints on ads and manages various advertising self-regulation monitoring programs. Meanwhile, consumer complaints are managed by the BBB directly in the framework of the [AdTruth program](#).

<sup>6</sup> JEP in Belgium. In the U.A.E., the ABG has a system in place for handling competitor complaints, but no complaints were received in 2018.

<sup>7</sup> According to the ICAS Methodology, consumer complaints include both complaints submitted by individual physical persons and complaints submitted by organizations representing consumers' interests. In case several complaints are received on the same ad and handled as a single case, all underlying complaints are counted. A complaint is defined as an expression of concern about a particular ad which requires a response. It may include one or several concerns about the given ad by the same complainant.

provided statistics on this service<sup>8</sup> collectively processed about 825 competitor complaints in 2018. In practice:

- 10 SROs handled fewer than 10 competitor complaints;
- 5 SROs handled between 10 and 50 competitor complaints;
- 6 SROs handled more than 50 competitor complaints.

As in the case of consumer complaints, the UK ASA is the SRO handling the highest number of competitor complaints per year: 356 in 2018.

**In the majority of cases (86%), decisions on consumer complaints are publicly available.** The list of decisions (sometimes called “rulings”) is typically available on the SRO’s website, and a list of links to such pages can be accessed via the ICAS [Global SRO Database](#). Those decisions may be published in full or in summary form, depending on the applicable rules of procedure. In one case (Romania), decisions can be accessed via a secured extranet developed for SRO members rather than via the public website. Regarding three SROs which do not publish decisions on consumer complaints, they count among those SROs handling 15 or fewer consumer complaints per year.

**Competitor complaints are also often publicly available (82% of cases),** but the decisions may only be published in part or in an anonymized form due to the sensitivity of some aspects pertaining to competition law.

Finally, it should be noted that, in more than half of the markets covered by the ICAS Global SRO database, **complaints can also be received from other entities** than consumers and competitors. Such entities include public authorities and NGOs, but some SROs also sometimes undertake own initiative investigations to identify ads which are in potential breach of self-regulatory standards.

### C. Other services

In addition to advisory services and complaints handling, SROs often provide other services locally to serve the needs of consumers and of the advertising industry. Educational services are especially important to raise awareness about ad standards and enhance compliance. Such services include online and in-person courses, certification programmes, conferences, as well as partnerships with universities and other educational institutions. Some SROs also provide monitoring services in relation to specific sectors, sometimes carried out in cooperation with public authorities in co-regulation scenarios. Finally, a few SROs offer mediation services (e.g. in the telecoms sector) and specialized services to address privacy and data protection concerns around marketing practices.

To find out more about the activities of SROs in all the ICAS markets, you can download their activity reports from the [Global SRO Database](#) or visit their websites, listed on the [Members](#) page of the ICAS website.

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<sup>8</sup> Figures are missing for France.

## Annex: List of Advertising Self-Regulatory Organizations worldwide

The below list includes organizations which can broadly be described as SROs, i.e. independent bodies set up and/or funded by the advertising industry to apply self-regulatory standards aimed at ensuring that advertisements are ethical.

In several markets not listed here, including major markets like China and Russia, efforts are under way to establish fully-fledged independent SROs. ICAS and its European sister organization EASA work closely with these markets to support the promotion of advertising self-regulation.

Please note that the data included in the ICAS Global SRO Database and in this Factbook only include members of ICAS (marked in bold).

<i>Country code</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Short name of the SRO</i>	<i>Full name of the SRO</i>	<i>Association membership</i>
<b>AE</b>	<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	<b>ABG</b>	<b>Advertising Business Group</b>	<b>ICAS</b>
AR	Argentina	CONARP	Consejo de Autorregulación Publicitaria	CONARED*
AT	Austria	ÖWR	Österreichischer Werberat (Austrian Advertising Council)	EASA
<b>AU</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>Ad Standards</b>	<b>Ad Standards</b>	<b>ICAS</b>
<b>BE</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>JEP</b>	<b>Jury d'Ethique Publicitaire / Jury voor Ethische Praktijken inzake reclame</b>	<b>EASA, ICAS</b>
BG	Bulgaria	NCSR	National Council for Self-regulation	EASA
<b>BR</b>	<b>Brazil</b>	<b>CONAR</b>	<b>Conselho Nacional de Autorregulamentação Publicitária</b>	<b>CONARED*, ICAS</b>
<b>CA</b>	<b>Canada</b>	<b>Ad Standards</b>	<b>Ad Standards</b>	<b>ICAS</b>
CH	Switzerland	FW	Swiss Commission for Fairness in Commercial Communication	EASA
<b>CL</b>	<b>Chile</b>	<b>CONAR</b>	<b>Consejo de Autorregulación y Ética Publicitaria</b>	<b>CONARED*, ICAS</b>
CO	Colombia	CCACC	Comisión Colombiana de Autorregulación de la Comunicación Comercial	ICAS
CY	Cyprus	CARO	Cyprus Advertising Regulation Organisation	EASA
CZ	Czech Republic	RPR	Rada Pro Reklamu	EASA
DE	Germany	DW WBZ	Deutscher Werberat Zentrale zur Bekämpfung unlauteren Wettbewerbs e.V.	EASA
EC	Ecuador	SAC	Special Advertisement Committee	CONARED*

ES	Spain	AUTOCONTROL	AUTOCONTROL	EASA, ICAS
FI	Finland	MEN  LTL	Mainonnan eettinen neuvosto / The Council of Ethics in Advertising Finland Liiketalpalautakunta / The Board of Business Practice Finland	EASA
FR	France	ARPP	<b>Autorité de régulation professionnelle de la publicité</b>	EASA, ICAS
GR	Greece	SEE	Advertising Self-Regulation Council	EASA
HU	Hungary	ÖRT	Önszabályozó Reklám Testület (Hungarian Advertising Self- Regulatory Board)	EASA
ID	Indonesia	DPI	Dewan Periklanan Indonesia	n/a
IE	Ireland	ASAI	<b>The Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland</b>	EASA, ICAS
IN	India	ASCI	<b>The Advertising Standards Council of India</b>	ICAS
IT	Italy	IAP	<b>Istituto dell'Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria</b>	EASA, ICAS
JP	Japan	JARO	Japan Advertising Review Organization	n/a
KR	Korea	KCSC	Korea Communications Standards Commission	n/a
LT	Lithuania	LRB	Lietuvos Reklamos Biuras	EASA
LU	Luxembourg	CLEP	Commision Luxembourgeoise pour l'Ethique en Publicité	EASA
MX	Mexico	CONAR	<b>Consejo de Autorregulación y Ética Publicitaria</b>	CONARED*, ICAS
MY	Malaysia	ASA	Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia	n/a
NL	The Netherlands	SRC	<b>Stichting Reclame Code</b>	EASA, ICAS
NZ	New Zealand	ASA	<b>Advertising Standards Authority</b>	ICAS
NO	Norway	MFU	Matbransjens Faglige Utvalg (the Food and Drink Industry Professional Practices Committee)	n/a
PE	Peru	CONAR	<b>Consejo Nacional de Autorregulación Publicitaria</b>	CONARED*, ICAS
PH	The Philippines	ASC	<b>Advertising Standards Council</b>	ICAS
PL	Poland	RR	Związek Stowarzyszeń Rada Reklamy	EASA
PT	Portugal	ARP	<b>Auto Regulação Publicitaria</b>	EASA, ICAS
PY	Paraguay	CERNECO	Centro de Regulacion, Normas y Estudios de la Comunicacion	CONARED*

<b>RO</b>	<b>Romania</b>	<b>RAC</b>	<b>Romanian Advertising Council</b>	<b>EASA, ICAS</b>
<b>SE</b>	<b>Sweden</b>	<b>RO</b>	<b>Reklamombudsmannen</b>	<b>EASA, ICAS</b>
SG	Singapore	ASAS	Advertising Standards Authority of Singapore	n/a
SI	Slovenia	SOZ	Slovenian Advertising Chamber	EASA
SK	Slovakia	RPR	Rada Pre Reklamu	EASA
<b>SV</b>	<b>El Salvador</b>	<b>CNP</b>	<b>Consejo Nacional de la Publicidad</b>	<b>CONARED*, ICAS</b>
TR	Turkey	ROK	The Advertising Self-Regulatory Board	EASA
<b>UK</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>ASA</b>	<b>The Advertising Standards Authority</b>	<b>EASA, ICAS</b>
<b>US</b>	<b>USA</b>	<b>ASRC</b>	<b>Advertising Self-Regulatory Council***</b>	<b>ICAS</b>
UY	Uruguay	CONARP	Consejo Nacional de Autorregulación Publicitaria	CONARED*
<b>ZA</b>	<b>South Africa</b>	<b>ARB</b>	<b>The Advertising Regulatory Board**</b>	<b>ICAS</b>
ZW	Zimbabwe	ASAZIM	The Advertising Standards Authority of Zimbabwe	n/a

\* CONARED is an informal network of Latin American SROs. Unlike EASA and ICAS, it does not have a permanent Secretariat. Its members usually meet on an annual basis.

\*\* The ARB was established in November 2018 following the closure of the former SRO, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) of South Africa. The data included in the 2018 Global SRO Factbook therefore only represents two months of operation for the ARB (November and December 2018).

\*\*\* On 1 June 2019, the ASRC was merged into BBB National Programs (BBB NP).



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The International Council for Advertising Self-Regulation (ICAS)

c/o EASA, Rue des Deux Eglises 26, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Contact person: Soraya Belghazi, ICAS Manager

Ph.: +32 474 88 19 85

<https://icas.global>

[info@icas.global](mailto:info@icas.global)