Verbraucherzentrale
Nordrhein-Westfalen

Siegelklarheit

The Siegelklarheit Detailed Assessment

The Sustainability Standards Comparison Tool (SSCT)

Introduction

The SSCT is used by Siegelklarheit to analyse and evaluate existing sustainability labels (also: sustainability standards). On Siegelklarheit, consumers can view the SSCT's assessment results on the credibility, environmental, and social performance of sustainability labels and thereby differentiate between them. The methodology was developed in 2013/2014 through a multi-year, multi-stakeholder process by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). More than 200 national and international experts from federal institutions, standard systems, academia, business, and civil society were consulted. These included, among others, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the ISEAL Alliance, the Öko-Institut, and the German Environment Agency (UBA). In 2020/2021, the SSCT was revised to make it more comprehensible, without losing detail or ambition. Since November 2025, Verbraucherzentrale NRW (Consumer Advisory of North Rhine-Westphalia) has been responsible for Siegelklarheit and has continuously been developing both the portal and the assessment methodology. The aim is to make the portal even more user friendly and accessible for consumers.

Basic Logic

The SSCT examines the objectives of sustainability standards and their application based on sets of assessment criteria in the areas of Credibility, Environmental Friendliness, and Social Responsibility.

- The requirements for Credibility apply to **all sectors** (e.g., textiles, paper, computers etc.). They are based on the principles of transparency, honesty, accessibility, and rigour, derived from the ISEAL credibility principles. These principles result from a multi-year consultation with more than 400 organisations from five continents.
- The requirements for Environmental Friendliness and Social Responsibility **vary by sector** to cover the most relevant topics. They represent the characteristics of sustainability labels that are most likely to have a positive environmental or social impact.

The SSCT draws on data from the ITC's Standards Map. This database contains up-to-date information on more than 350 sustainability standards from over 180 countries. It includes a wide range of criteria relating both to sustainability and to the operation of standards systems, such as auditing procedures and governance models. Through cooperation with the ITC and other benchmarking initiatives, a shared understanding of credible sustainability standard is promoted, and aligned sets of assessment criteria for analysis are ensured.

Assessment Process

On Siegelklarheit, a five-level evaluation scale is used with the aim of providing a differentiated classification of all sustainability labels visible to consumers. For each sector, a specific set of assessment criteria has been developed, consisting of minimum requirements and extended requirements in the three areas of Credibility, Environmental Friendliness, and Social Responsibility. The table shows the five-level evaluation scale and the basis for classification, which is explained below.

Table: Overview of five-level evaluation scale

Scale	**Focus 1:** **Basis within single area** (Credibility, Environment, Social)	**Focus 2 & 3:** **Evaluation across areas**
Visual distinction (diamond symbol)	Minimum criteria 100% + Score of at least 70%	Credibility **AND** Environment **AND** Social (Focus 3)
Excellent	Minimum criteria 100% + Score of at least 70%	Credibility and Environment **OR** Credibility and Social (Focus 2)
Highly Recommended	Minimum criteria 100% + Score of at least 50%	
Recommended	Minimum criteria zu mind. 85% + Score of at least 50%	
Needs Improvement	Minimum criteria at least 50%	
Poor	Minimum criteria below 50%	

Focus 1: Single assessment area (Credibility, Environmental Friendliness, Social Responsibility)

The assessment begins at the level of a single area. First, it is examined in each area (Credibility, Environmental Friendliness, Social Responsibility) whether or not the standard meets the **minimum requirements**. Minimum requirements address topics of particular relevance, such as the prohibition of forced labour. The key consideration is whether the minimum requirements in each area are met to less than half, at least half, at least 85 percent, or 100 percent.

Once the minimum criteria have been examined, they are assessed together with the **extended criteria** through a points-based scoring system in each area. The percentage of the total available points achieved (hereinafter "percentage score") within the sector-specific set of assessment criteria is then calculated for each area. The evaluation distinguishes between percentage scores of less than 50 percent, at least 50 percent, and at least 70 percent of the available points in each area.

Focus 2: Credibility and at least a second assessment area

In the next step, both compliance with the minimum criteria and the percentage score achieved are assessed for Credibility and at least one additional area (Environment **or** Social). Including the Credibility area as a mandatory component of the assessment ensures that the requirements set by the standard organisation are supported by a functioning implementation and assurance system. The alternative consideration of environmental or social criteria ensures that standards specialising in environmental or social issues can be assessed on an equal basis.

- **Poor:** Standards meeting fewer than half of the minimum criteria in the two areas, regardless of the percentage score achieved.
- **Needs Improvement:** Standards meeting between 50 and 85 percent of the minimum criteria in both areas, again regardless of the percentage score achieved.
- **Recommended:** Standards meeting at least 85 percent of the minimum criteria and achieving at least 50 percent of the available points in the two areas.
- **Highly Recommended:** Standards meeting all minimum criteria and achieving at least 50 percent of the available points in both areas.
- **Excellent**: Standards meeting all minimum criteria and achieving at least 70 percent of the available points in the two areas.

Focus 3: All three assessment areas (holistic sustainability)

Some standards address both environmental and social issues at a high level. This holistic approach to sustainability should also be reflected on Siegelklarheit. Therefore, standards that meet all minimum criteria and achieve at least 70 percent of the available points **across all three areas** (Credibility, Environmental Friendliness, Social Responsibility) receive a visual distinction (diamond symbol) in addition to the rating "Excellent".

Standards with the **detailed assessment** and standards that have **fully passed the quick check** meet the basic criteria that Siegelklarheit checks in light of the new requirements of Directive (EU) 2024/825 "Empowering consumers for the green transition".

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Verbraucherzentrale Nordrhein-Westfalen e.V., Helmholtzstraße 19, 40215 Düsseldorf
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