

The Sustainability Standards Comparison Tool (SSCT)

– Transparency and guidance for consumers

The SSCT is used by Siegelklarheit to analyse and evaluate existing sustainability labels (also: sustainability standards). On Siegelklarheit.de/en, consumers can view the SSCT's assessment results regarding the credibility, environmental, and social performance of sustainability labels and compare them (especially within a product group).

1. History

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.

2. Aim

The SSCT examines the objectives of the respective sustainability standards and their application based on sets of assessment criteria in the areas of credibility, environmental friendliness, and social responsibility.

- The credibility requirements apply to all product groups. 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 environmental and social requirements vary by product group to cover the most relevant topics. They represent the characteristics of sustainability labels that are most likely to have a positive social or environmental impact while ensuring high transparency.

The SSCT draws on data from the ITC's Standards Map. This database contains up-to-date information on more than 350 standard systems 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 standard systems is promoted, and aligned sets of assessment criteria for analysis are ensured.



3. Assessment procedure

For each product group, an overall set of assessment criteria has been developed, consisting of minimum requirements and extended requirements in the areas of credibility, environmental friendliness, and social responsibility. Minimum requirements address issues of particular relevance (e.g., the prohibition of forced labour).

Phase 1: Minimum requirements

Step 1: First, it is checked whether the label meets the minimum requirements in the area of credibility. This is currently a prerequisite for a label to be evaluated on Siegelklarheit.

- If this is not the case, the label cannot be represented.
- If the minimum requirements are met, continue with Step 2.

Step 2: Next, it is assessed whether the label also meets all minimum requirements in the areas of environmental friendliness and social responsibility.

- If none or too few minimum requirements are met, the label receives no star in the relevant area (environment or social).
- If at least 50 percent of the minimum requirements in an area are met, the label receives one star.
- If all minimum requirements in the area are met, the label receives at least two stars and the assessment proceeds to Step 3.
- Otherwise, the label cannot be represented.

Phase 2: Extended requirements

Step 3: Now, for each area, the percentage of the score achieved against the overall set of assessment criteria is calculated to determine whether the label meets the threshold of 60 percent (the requirement for three stars).

- If the percentage is below 60 percent, the label remains at two stars in that area.
- If the percentage is at least 60 percent, the label is awarded three stars for the relevant area.

Step 4: The overall rating (“Good choice” or “Very good choice”) is then determined.

- A label is rated “Good choice” if it achieves at least two stars in the credibility area and in either the environmental or social area.
- A label receives the overall rating “Very good choice” if it achieves three stars in the credibility area and in one additional area.