

# SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS COMPARISON TOOL

## How the Sustainability Standards Comparison Tool (SSCT) helps governments and consumers navigate the complex sustainability standards landscape.

### Need for transparency and orientation

Businesses, governments, and consumers use standards or labels to identify sustainable products. They trust that the right standard will lead to positive social and environmental impacts. Over the past twenty years, hundreds of standards and certification schemes were developed. They address different sustainability issues and fit different purposes.

As a result, buyers from the public sector and industry spend vast amounts of energy evaluating which standards work best for them. However, there often remain more questions than answers. Similarly, consumers find an increasingly complex landscape of standards and seek information about their credibility. Transparency, as well as information on reliability and ambition of the content of different standards are therefore highly needed.

Therefore, the Sustainability Standards Comparison Tool (SSCT) was developed which is an online tool that enables these stakeholders to analyse and compare different sustainability standards easily and intuitively.

### The SSCT

In order to analyse and compare different standards, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) has developed the SSCT methodology. On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), GIZ consulted about 200 international experts from governmental organisations, standard systems, academia, the corporate sector, and civil society. These include, for instance, the Internationale Trade Centre (ITC), *ISEAL Alliance* members, *Öko-Institut*, and the *German Environment Agency*.

The methodology includes a set of criteria looking at the ecological and social issues that standards address as well as a criteria set focused on their credibility. Criteria concerning environmental and social challenges vary for every product group to better align with group-specific challenges.

The criteria used to assess the credibility of a standard organisation are the same for all product groups. The credibility criteria are based on elements like transparency, truthfulness, accessibility, and rigour, which are drawn from the ISEAL Credibility Principles. These principles result from a consultation with contributions from more than 400 organisations from five continents. They represent those characteristics of standard and certification schemes that are most likely to achieve positive social, environmental or economic impacts while ensuring a high level of transparency.

The criteria are harmonised with ITC's Standards Map. This database currently houses up-to-date data for more than 300 standard systems operating in over 180 countries. The database includes hundreds of sustainability criteria, as well as criteria about the operation of standard schemes, such as audit practices and good governance models. By cooperating with ITC and other benchmarking initiatives, SSCT works towards a common understanding of credible standard systems and an aligned set of criteria for analysis.

In 2021, the SSCT was revised to make it more comprehensible without losing detail and ambition.

### Which sectors and aspects does SSCT cover?

SSCT covers a wide range of social and environmental standards from the consumer goods sector such as textiles and IT. For each of these product groups, it analyses if and in what detail standards address relevant environmental issues, such as chemical use, and relevant social issues, such as forced labour and discrimination. In addition, the SSCT covers criteria to measure a standard's credibility by looking at good practices in the areas of scheme management, standard-setting, assurance and claims & traceability.

### Customized comparison

The SSCT is integrated in different websites which provide target group-specific information to different audiences. In February 2015, the German Government launched *Siegelklarheit* which uses SSCT to provide information on different sustainability standards to German consumers. In addition, SSCT is integrated in the Standard Comparison Tool on *Kompass Nachhaltigkeit* which supports public procurers in Germany, among other things, in considering sustainability standards when purchasing goods.



### *Siegelklarheit*

- shows consumers what is behind a label and helps understand the differences
- offers orientation in the “label landscape”
- enables users to compare different standards within product groups
- [www.siegelklarheit.de](http://www.siegelklarheit.de)



### *Kompass Nachhaltigkeit*

- is aimed at procurement officers in public agencies and institutions
- assists with the implementation of social and environmental aspects into tenders
- helps to find and compare the standard to proof a certain sustainability criterion
- also offers practical examples, basic knowledge, monitoring- and strategy tools
- [www.kompass-nachhaltigkeit.de/en](http://www.kompass-nachhaltigkeit.de/en)

*Siegelklarheit is being implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). As an initiative of the German Federal Government Siegelklarheit is being coordinated by a Steering Committee that also includes the Federal Ministries for Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), as well as for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).*